



LIT 9: Volume Five, Number Two

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LIT

New School University

Writing Program, Room 514

66 W. 12th Street

New York, NY 10011

e-mail: LIT@newschool.edu

web address: www.nsu.newschool.edu/writing/lit

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CONTENTS

Gabriel Gudding	Gerard Manley Horses • An Ditch • Formal Poetry • The Gripping	9
Max Winter	Today and Yesterday • Today, 4	10
Franz Wright	The Truth Will Set You Free • Doctrine • The Reader • Parting Word Arkansas First Light • Arkansas First Snow • To the Sun, to the Risen	12
Fanny Howe	Before the First • Disabling • In the Garden Behind the Library	18
Jeff Tweedy	When I Say My Heart • Easy Bake Oven • At Night <i>Ein Moment</i> • Kitten Epic	20
Chris Tonelli	There Were Two Fields, Robert • Out of Your Hair • Dimension	31
Ales Debeljack, trans. by Andrew Zawacki & the author	In Her Footsteps Last Resort • Metamorphosis of Pain	32
Lisa Pearson	Paradise c. 1989	42
Ben Bagocius	Road Trip • Tabletop	45
John Latta	Ash and Mnemonic • War and Jerk	
Huy Dao	Gulf of Mexico	49
John Hennessy	Summer, That Protesant Verb • Shaved Head My Mother Explains • Eviction Song	58
Will Esposito	Elephant • Ode	63
Ellis Avery	From <i>The Smoke Week: Sept. 11-21, 2001</i>	66
Michael Schiavo	As Oarsmen Paddle • Your Pristine Fangs	
Bruce Smith	Stir	69
Jenifer L. Knox	Mastering the Lesson of Odds Why We Came and Why We Stayed • Spring and Still Some Short	70
Jim Behrle	The Day Sugar Was Born • A Fire in the Eyes of a Fire-Colored House	76
Ted Mathys	The Demolition	78
Katey Nicosia	Nobody Could Hold Herself Miniature for Long Things That Are Handled	80
Melanie Figg	Psalm Somatic 4	81
Sara Kaplan	Another Salut	95
Michael Robbins	Far candle • Sept	96
Sean McNally	Get to Know Your Presidential Pets 1-3 Questions and Podiums (1-2)	99
Robert Polito	The Farber Equation	102
Anthony Robinson	Simple Seduction • Battle Lines	104
Nicholas Twemlow	Dear Consommé • Intracranial pinball. Tilt	105
Jason Stumpf	We Say to One Another • The Voyage	109
Laurel Snyder	From <i>Daphne @ Jim: The Truth and Other Stories</i>	110
Kathleen Ossip	Cinephrastics	
Michele Rosenthal	Secrets of a Samurai	115
Kirsten Kaschock	Board's Response to Initial Query • Marriage (3)	115
Ernest Hilbert	Nostalgia of Space	118
Tony Tost	Bad Horse	120
Daniel Borzutzky	Are Nudists Nuts?	122
Richard Peabody	Princess Daddy	126
John Randolph Carter	God, Here I Go Again / Bottoms Up!	127
Jason Schneiderman	Wester • This Is My Body You Eat	129
Tammara Lindsay	Dear TJ Maxx	130
Mike Topp	Wyoming • Castle • Preparing for a Blackout	130
Joanna Fuhrman	Moraine for Bob	136
Jack Kimball	For Charles Bernstein • Unhappy Teen Blond	137
Maureen Thorson	Too Late Now	147
Felicia Swanson	Sugar Water	148
Jaime Anne Corbacho	Hot Soccer Mom Action • Google Search The Belt out from Where You Rested, Raymond Chandler	150

Lara Glenum	Sock Monkey's Treatise on the New Typography	154
David Lehman	London Diary • Midterm	155
Thomas David Lisk	The Heidelberg Whip	156
Joshua Corey	From <i>Severance Songs</i>	159
Betsy Johnson	Move the Space	164
Adriana Grant	Family Restaurant	165
Amy Sickels	The Orphan	166
Ada Limón	He Has Big Thoughts While His Wife Is Sleeping The Hardware Lady Repeats Herself • The Lady at the Hardware Store Gets Sad Again	168
Jerome Sala	Etymology of the "Barn" • The Four Visions of Saint Nemo	181
Joe Wenderoth	The Day of Prayer, from <i>Agony: A Proposal</i>	183
Julie Carr	From <i>Mead: An Epithalamion</i> : 36 From <i>Mead: An Epithalamion</i> : 49. The Outside Lamented by the Inside	188
Erika Raskin	First Person Present Tense	197
Annabelle Yeeseul Yoo	Simplicity	
Rob Cook	Sally Joy Newark	200
Paul Killebrew	ILOVETHEWHOLEFUCKINWORLD	201
Aaron McCollough	The Third Poem of Jan Vandermeer • Sonnet Manqué #1 Sonnet Manqué # 4	203
Geoff Bouvier	I Will Not Excuse You, You Shall Not Be Excused, Excuses Shall Not Be Admitted, There Is No Excuse Shall Serve, You Shall Not Be Excused	206
Trudy Renall Ames	Stanza In Praise of Gertrude Stein • Too True	209
Fernando Pessoa, trans. by Richard Zenith	(Six Poems)	210
James Tate	The Solitary Fisherman • The Vision • McDermott The Tri-County Fair	218

Christopher Salerno	Try Loving Someone Who Doesn't Love You Collected Marginalia	95
Jean Tardieu, trans. by Marcia Mead Lebré	Verb and Subject • A Road	99
Jacques Prévert, trans. by Marcia Mead Lebré	Child Hunt	95
Rae Armantrout	Cursive • Away	102
Phil West	Honeymoon Days • The Archeology of Morning After	104
Contribuors	Title	105

Gabriel Gudding

Gerard Manley Horses

GLORY be to Horses for dappled manes—
For eyes of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-mares all in stipple upon fetlocks that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-tails; haunches' wings;
Paddock plotted and pieced—foal, fallow, and plough;
All áll studs, their gear and tackle and trim.

All geldings counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
They nicker-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise them.

LIT



Gabriel Gudding

An Ditch

They have leftt uth a lone at lath
There are logth and thtarth to thtub our teeth and catch too at our eyeth:
Thith ditch ith gloriouth.

Look at them! The night'th jarth, the thtrange daubing wellth of light:
You over me then like a thtar!, our legth twining
below our grointh.
Your deep fish. My hand-ache. My handth walk
into the China of your boobieth.

Making love in thith ditch
ith gloriouth

Formal Poetry

Some mornings, lightbeams wooly, when I wake
and shake the semen from its tap while
thinking of your face, boobies, or hips hitched up
before me as a saddled thing—I wonder

often, after, if you would think my effort
—astraddle the drooled pillow compacted
hips gantried forward, non-church
grunting, the spade hand shuttling in my middle

and eyes extruded in tawdry awe—would you
think the effort ugly, or over willed? And after
when all is stilled and there is wonder in the pause,
my penis wet with nether pus: did anyone see

what, contra naturam, I just goddamned did?
Thus so, the world, at once both thrilled and dead.

LIT

10

Gabriel Gudding

LIT

11

Gabriel Gudding

The Gripping

She is gripping things all over the house
the window now. Now the drapes
got the sash. Now it is the chair
she grips of the hall, wool towel
grip does not work well. She is grips her bottom, now
toilet, putting burning groceries
out house, anything burning
out house, putting Pete
—lascivious carpenter—out house,
will put bad Greek salad out, out
with oleaginous mouth of teen who went
banging and sucking down hall,
it goes, vile mouth goes out house she puts all out door.
She grips two books, then coffee
grips two chocolate,
a pen, envelope, now a bill. She grips
my nose, my glasses, my
my.

Max Winter Today and Yesterday

Forget what they say.
The best ones stay open all night.

An oven in the street
with spring in its heart.

Two birds on top of a green stone.
The return of the search.

The street blank for the first time
in a month.

Marvelous returns on the first casting.

A reenactment
with the eye and the pinkie.

O unbearable challenge
let me into your garden.

LIT

12

Gabriel Gudding

LIT

13

Max Winter

Today, 4

On the bus
the question rises whatisit
that makes you happy
and do you do that thing
or do you let it swim past you
enjoying only the splashes
on your already wet brow.
A meeting is held
but the matter remains
in fragments.
The answer always the same
as if echoing through a deserted dance hall
on the Gulf:
Let me.
The proper extensions are buried.
Without them the game is lost.

At this table of evening
everyone has at least one bullet.

Franz Wright

The Truth Will Set You Free

(After René Char)

You are the lamp, and you are the night.
This small upstairs window is yours
to look out from, this cot is
for your exhaustion alone; the single
drop of water is going to cure your thirst!
And these four walls belong to the being
your pure clarity brought into this world,
oh prisoner—
oh bride.

LIT

14

Max Winter

LIT

15

Franz Wright

Doctrine

Dear animal

form we are
entering the
world

of the spirit, of the way

the universe appeared when we weren't there.

Clear radiant awareness
without an object (and
without a subject)...

The sun in space, the sun

imagined and the word
sun

on this page:

twelve haloed apes
in a circle
inventing

the zero

at each moment, practicing

the presence of God.

The Reader

The mask was gone now, burned away
(from inside)
by God's gaze

There was no
I, there

was no he—
finally

there was no text, only
what the words stood for;
and then

what all things stand for.

LIT

16

Franz Wright

LIT

17

Franz Wright

Parting Word

As for me
I have no mind
to lose, I am all through
with that—
the sky is my mind
today. (And

it always is
and always was

today.) Blue,
her color
sorrowing over us.

Does it flow out of or into us, seeing?

Unseen ray of perception the face beams
at things, or
face on which things shine!
I am so glad

that I no longer know,
no longer
care.
And one more thing:

the future?
Never

been there.

Arkansas First Light

My life is so strange now, though I've come to love
this southern ghost place: the weather here
in January somewhat like the silver not-at-all-
cold light in Boston's March—and I hear there is snow

blowing over from Tulsa today, maybe
later this afternoon. My houseless life
here is so blessed, through scary hours
and of course long months of my Elizabethlessness:

I am very afraid but still know You
are taking care of me, and even live in hope
You will one day see fit to put into my mouth
words that will explain it all, floating before me in letters

of fire, the planet and her sleeping
face beginning out of nothing
to be made visible once again.
In the midst of death, I am in life.

LIT

18

Franz Wright

LIT

19

Franz Wright

Arkansas First Snow

For Beth

What happens to me is not very important
(correction: not at all important)
but I will be sad never again

rather, it will be sad
never again
to read Blake's "The Sunflower," or Emily Dickinson's

"My departing blossoms....,"
or to see your face.
I would like to go on doing that on for some decades

and quietly studying the correspondences
of inner/outer worlds,
though I know they are one and the same now:
that emerald light shining far off in the distance

this afternoon as I was passing through
the empty park, snow beginning in earnest—
it can snow here!—I want to find out what it means;

I want to and I don't. I want to know
and I want the mystery,
both

but I doubt there will be enough time,
it is so far and lovely from here.
Farther and far lovelier than ever.

To the Sun, to the Risen

For now you are still
just a word, but
the time is coming
when you will namelessly
unperceived
shine once
again

So the visionary is whatever is
self-evident
e.g.

I am voyaging around the sun for now

Return me to, return
to me

the still gold-lit
place
of Your peace

still gold-lit

space

I have quieted my soul like a weaned child

And permit my small translation
to nothing at last

LIT

20

Franz Wright

LIT

21

Franz Wright

Fanny Howe

Before the First

I think it's cold for the creator
Like the final fountain

In a vault of absolute ice

Turquoise and white
All its words and religious music

Were removed to us by a book
And turned into ideas

This is how transition can be cunning

And interpreters keep returning
Long after the destruction of the temple

•

Creator who is the universe—us—

everywhere
as if

lost—

or an experience of prayer: stars

Disabling

It seems the west is chased by the sun
Every day to this, this

Is how we see time run, caught, parsed and drowned
Leaving each wall the color of shadow

Smoke in the seats, second class
Ourselves vacant in transition or else

The west blows east across the globe
And into the face of the sun.

There's one person, if I don't see you again
I have a feeling

Someone else will sweep you along.
Unemployed and terrified

Out of work and on the edge
Of breakdown, where will your money

Come from, how will you pay
To eat, for nursing care, drugs, swill,

For cigarettes, butter, jam and toast....
If you don't take the ferry east

Ahead of the word that I hate.

LIT

22

Fanny Howe

LIT

23

Fanny Howe

In the Garden Behind the Library

The city is a desert with water on every side
And strong working people

Pushing along.
Soon you will be one of them.

X forgave Peter three times three
Then went into a nearby garden to cry.

A rejected gesture turns to syrup
It has a sickening taste

And its color is maroon.
It is a substance you carry around like an island.

I told you love produces more love
Until it is marooned in its own dark hands.

Then it knows something.

Jeff Tweedy When I Say My Heart

I mean
an emergency
worse than a clarinet

or an old man who just won't
stand out of the way

I don't mean a parking lot
but the pretty twisting oil slick

the waving arms
of awful drinking

false teeth

an unpopular child
on a swing set
or the least wanted crayon

sometimes I mean
a foil moon

checkpoint charlie
or a ghost

or sitting duck

LIT

24

Fanny Howe

LIT

25

Jeff Tweedy

Easy Bake Oven

I wish I could
move you like a millionaire
however I please
make you sing
chocolate cupcakes and other
teen recipes

I wish I could
move you like a millionaire
remember what you made
a poet down on my knees
spray-painted pink shoes
filling up all your pans
you made stink

I wish I could
fuck you like he thinks he does
before he falls asleep
but I've never been that tired
and I've never been too sad
to eat

At Night

in the southern galaxy
at the tip of the letter *k*
I'm afraid to look at moving pictures

in the jukebox din
scratched to silence
breaking bread

I hide from the flux of time
the burning light
funneled into perfect holes

I'm content to know
that I'm not a spot of unsung melody
afraid to look at moving pictures

LIT

26

Jeff Tweedy

LIT

27

Ein Moment

the peach colored payphone
in a bathroom in Munich
is calling America selfishly

the self-styled warlock
with tincture of lotus
holding a hand-held recorder

to my beak—I'm an interviewee
as if to say *this is important*
now I know you're not listening

this is what love is for

Kitten Epic

seeing not so well
falsetto failing
and irregular
chasing children
like an epic
the kitten
epic
upon freeing
breaking away from
the motorcade
finds us both
lonely for a throne

where the waves
are pewter
blankets of dull
silver motion

LIT

28

Jeff Tweedy

LIT

29

Jeff Tweedy

Out of Your Hair

On looking at Chagall's Midsummer Night's Dream

I too, at times, feel
like a goat
of a groom,
groping you
with my
ungainly hand,
my unwieldy
nonhoof. It, it appears,
is the feature
I am most proud
to offer you.
Or at least that part of us
at which I cannot stop staring
Though I really like my colorful horns.

The devil himself has been dive-bombing them all evening,
though he seems a bit distracted,
riveted almost, by my very average ears, imploring me,
as if even he's fed up, to do
something good.

Someone should tell him that
it's just not his thing. He's even recaptured the attention
of one of The Angel's (the lead singer I think)
who luckily has quit it
and just stays put
clutching his dunce fiddle.

I am concerned, though,

about my perfectly oval eye,
growing more enormous,
possibly feeding off of your fading visage.
But if you could see this tree
the lake...

Maybe it is
my hand
—see here it is—
I don't know.

You seem a bit exhausted by my
yellow goatness, standing there
with an expression that reads:
Honey, please...the guests
as you cover up my hard-on,
now showing under my brown trousers,
with that blue
fan is it?

LIT

32

Chris Tonelli

LIT

33

Chris Tonelli

Dimension

split the blue air
and emerge—
said sun to color gray
poor gray
clinging to the nude trees

but gray said—
I'm with the headstones
in this brutal wind
they're almost flinching—

and gray became the headstones

so sun shone
on the wrought iron fence
around the cemetery

and gray grew nervous—
sun, the brittle black trees
slither towards the sky—

so gray became the sky
higher than the trees
covering sun

gray apologized—

I know what's down there—said sun—
and I want you

to see for me

I see a smokestack
basking above the fog
that fills the furrows
of this short town

look closer gray
what else

a hawk gliding
no dancing
with the plume of smoke
teetering in the stiff currents

and

and the trees
they've softened
their feathery cilia
blending with the early
gray dusk

and

and a brilliant cardinal
in one of the low branches
and the asphalt paths have
portioned the Common
into fragments
white beige
dead-yellow

now repeat after the cardinal

a tree for everything you've stripped

LIT

34

Chris Tonelli

LIT

35

Chris Tonelli

gray
this is your new sound—

night fell

gray became
the most distant of lamplight

and sun whispered from the dark—
look at you gray
floating among the stars

but this is just the Common—gray said—
and these are just park lamps

they're stars

Geof Huth
Title

LIT

36

Chris Tonelli

LIT

37

Geof Huth

Ales Debeljak

In Her Footsteps

Translated by Andrew Zawacki & the author

You walk by, slender as the season of sunlight
at the North Pole, men and women at a loss
for words, tears to nudge a heart follow the riverbeds
of history on their faces, even the palm tree
secretly swings to the rhythm of your stride,
even the ocean floor cannot stay still.
And here I stand and look, a barefoot boy
a clear sky took for a memory of ancient times,
when there was not yet a horizon to see
and even the most attentive eye would find
no animal as taut as you when you walk by.
You walk by, the city is once again closing
behind your steps. All the way to the curbside
cherries have been washed up, the crowd
that follows you gathers them, and I admire you
all together, this light is too strong for just me.
How gratefully my knee bends when you neither
ask nor offer anything, hinting instead
at the right to expect you, our one and only guest,
and you send us a signal, not wholly clear,
that though we alter the images of your body
the law remains the same: this day must be
blessed in your name.

Last Resort

Translated by Andrew Zawacki & the author

I like going bareheaded, like to stick out my tongue,
I've got no interest in clay or how it's handled,
and I try to obey the law, insofar as I understand it.
I accept it like singing, less often like dancing,
an annual holiday. Since you've shown me
the narrow path to protection, my hope has grown.
Give me the loyalty lacking in nature, give me
the bones to call out like a child, I will strike
like a camera's flash through comma after comma,
through fog as it covers the fen. Can't you make
an exception? Give me a life that is unlike the others
who lean along the sky, make me gravitate
downward instead, into the porous earth:
and force me forward, no stopping,
make me drill a hole in the capillaries, almost
imperceptible as I am bent on serving you,
on licking you as if you were resin
the pilgrims, in opium fields, were greedy for.
I put my tongue inside you to prove—as if
you needed proof—that you are not alone
when it floods you where you want. There is only
one world. I guard it without a shred of remorse.

LIT

38

Ales Debeljak

LIT

39

Ales Debeljak

Metamorphosis of Pain

Translated by Andrew Zawacki & the author

A wall, covered with reddish ivy
surviving winter, and over there
a glance the length of the empty street
and a man who might get old—
I say might, because new skin
never fails to cover a cut,
it tingles once in a while
more gently than the mistral
blowing through mirrorless rooms,
this we know. While in folds
of the couch there's a book
and the sky, crushed into flocks
of birds and signs, scattered randomly,
like islands in the Adriatic
or letters of poets lying open,
boys upheld by illusions of chewing
green, narcotic leaves from here
to hereafter—I among them.
We give the image etched with our spit
a hundred names for god, we draw it
aside, exactly like this, a blasé gesture
parting more curtains than comfort,
the rush of a creek in the distant hills
where everyone wants to end up.
Murmur of water, wellspring noise,
watering us as it waters me,
the meadow, the houses, bottles,
the snow. It can make a boy thirsty,
lost as he is in the sinister landscape

of someone else's yard. It brings hope,
that whoever can manage to stay alive
is a little holy and no less mad.

LIT

40

Ales Debeljak

LIT

41

Ales Debeljak

Lisa Pearson

Paradise c. 1989

With quotations from A History of Paradise by Jean Delumeau

1

In the Tnugdhal Vision of 1149, a monk saw Purgatory divided by a wall. On one side of the wall stood those not entirely evil. They escaped the stench of hell but the rain and wind was constant, the days long. On the other side were those not entirely good. There was a meadow of joy through which they could walk, and the fountain of life flowed from which they could drink, but they could not smell the grass and flowers nor taste the water. On both sides of the wall, everyone was waiting.

Perhaps some of them thought themselves already in hell or in heaven.
And if the wall fell?

2

In paradise, men and women are like little children: *their faces shine like the sun, their bodies are made of the light of the stars, incorruptible. They are bold and confident without confusion, glad without fear.*

3

Every shop window, dusty and gray. Inside, pyramids of faded boxes, dented tin cans, defeated plastic sacks still sealed, chipped green bottles. Inside them, laundry detergent, elbow macaroni, tiny sausages, boiled potatoes, salt, beer. Oftentimes the window displays were empty, only the drape of red cloth, whitened like a sick tongue, lay wrinkled and bare. There, on the corner, where the street names have been changed from that of one little god to another, in the store window, there remained only a small paper tag leftover from an item long gone, the string undone and curled like a tiny white snake, basking in the winter sun. Handwritten: "Fragment of Happiness Found in Paradise."

4

In paradise, peace prevails. There is no theft, no strife, no greed, no duress, no divisions. All property is held in common and wealth is not esteemed. Everyone lives in a condition of relative happiness without desire as nothing

more is needed than what everyone already has. There is no hunger. So harmonious are the people here that they eat only one kind of food each day and everyone eats the same. There is just enough for everyone. There is no want. There are no poor. All the inhabitants have two tongues to carry on two conversations, one of which is so quiet you can hear it only if you listen carefully, but children born there begin that whisper at a very early age. In paradise, only believers live—heretics and unbelievers, once they arrive, are either immediately converted or fall to the ground stone dead. And there is no lying here. You cannot lie in paradise.

5

It is said that paradise still exists on earth but is impossible to reach, as far away as the moon from the sun, the bottom of the ocean from the highest mountain peak. Encircled by a wall of fire, and ringed by an expanse of chalky white desert in which only the most poisonous and ferocious of creatures live, the gates of Eden are open to only those with a highly auspicious passport or a mandate from God.

There are many who have tried in vain to reach paradise. They died from exhaustion from rowing against swells of waves, the noise of the water rendering them deaf, the salt blind. Or they died from the wounds and stabs of stumbling in circles over rough terrain through darkness—no moon, no stars—where demons set little traps to trip men underfoot. Or from the madness of visions from which there is no refuge: Some men have entered Eden but so besieged by visions, they did not know where they were.

Legions of cherubim stand guard at those fiery gates. They have wings as iridescent as the rainbow, as broad in span as a monstrous bird of prey. They are vigilant, these cherubim: no one is allowed into paradise and no one is allowed out, though there are exceptions and escapes. But it is most difficult to determine on which side of the gate lies Eden.

If you are let in, have you then been kept out?

6

Paradise is both the place where history begins and the place where it ends.

—St. Ephraem

7

Here, where the mountain abuts the moon, is paradise, protected by an impenetrable darkness. Imagine any want and it can be fulfilled. Everything in excess. There are perpetual springs, an abundance of fruit and flowers, the

most voluptuous of fragrances and tastes—just a breath of an orange will feed a man for days. There are rivers of jewels and oceans of milk, and the streets sparkle in the sunlight. There is merry-making beyond the reach of evil, no fear of punishment, no fear of death. Millions of loyal men ready for any battle. And there are thousands of glorious marvels whether of divine providence or mortal ingenuity: five-footed frogs and two-headed cows are but two small examples. Paradise is the world of infinite possibility.

8

When the Wall fell, it nevertheless remained. For months, more than a year. Every day, from almost any part of the city, you could hear the chime-like din, the constant ching-ching of hammers pounding spikes to split the concrete into rocks, bigger and smaller chunks to hold in your hands, the smooth faces of them colorful but indecipherable—the words and pictures drawn there like a little snippet of a dream, now silent.

In the spring of 1990, I met a Polish man on an airplane between New York and Berlin. He told me he was pouring concrete, spray-painting it, breaking it apart, then selling the chunks, fictitiously labeled, to department stores in the United States. A killing, he said. Everyone in America wanted a little piece of freedom to hold in their in their hands. *If you took all the pieces sold in the United States*, he told me, *you could build another wall to split America in two. Maybe along the Mississippi.*

God, I love the Americans, he said, *they will buy anything.*

At the base of the Berlin Wall, particularly in places where it was hammered down to hip-height, slivers of concrete and mounds of dust rose like rock and sand in a desert. You could imagine dunes laying waste to the city. But the winds rose often in spring, and a thin film of dust clung to windows and doors, and the crumbles of rock gathered in the sidewalk cracks. That's where it went: everywhere and nowhere.

9

Paradise is not useless though no one lives there anymore.

Ben Bagocius

Road Trip

For D. A. B.

The sky's moved all these miles with me

Or it hasn't moved an inch

It's as big as I am

Small

LIT

44

Lisa Pearson

LIT

45

Ben Bagocius

Tabletop

I took my arm
and with one fell swoop
knocked the fear section
off the table
Lies, vases, timidities
smashed to the floor: an orchestra
could not have made a more exulting
final roar

I recognized the now empty space immediately:
grains, swirls
in the wood—still shiny—
dust hadn't gotten to
on account of the mess

I'm standing in front of that table
Lies, vases, terrors:
shards of glass everywhere
If I move
I'll slice my feet

John Latta Ash and Mnemonic

Ash-radickall'd be the asters,

Root'd in the star-kemb'd

Night, glints of divinity up

Against the bad bounce of

The brain ball, its cycloramic

Dints of genuine lustre too

Weak and silly to confute

Or stop. It's morning now,

And the night ken'd nigh

Nothing, 'a wandrynge beastely lyfe

Goone in a dramms myster

Unto playne madnes and follye.'

The sun hath a wondrous

Firk and pull, doth uncover

The sky, for whom one

Mnemonic is 'fayre mayden naked.'

LIT

46

Ben Bagocius

LIT

47

John Latta

John Latta

War and Jerk

You, yond thing, one of
The 'sowdgers that fyghte' whilst
Us 'Civill swaines groe savedge,
Rude, and wilde,' for that
Is what a foreign war
Bringeth, not more struttle (fish),
Nor pooties (snails), nor goods
To rattle th'unhusband'd sad nation.
And you, fucker, Texas pecker-
Wood: more moral a clod
Of sun-blast'd earth is,
More credulous an Asse hauling
A cloud behind. If only
That Asse'd chose you, smirker,
Jug-ear'd contemptuous jerk, to
Haul off into the burn.

LIT

48

John Latta

Huy Dao

Gulf of Mexico

Basbo appears as translated by Lucien Styrk

The things we've swallowed
in the vastness
The arming and re-arming
Into which I watched two sea birds
vanishing
making uses for themselves
outside of being

62

Where cuckoo

vanishes—

an island

But I touched the ocean anyway
looked in its creases, nothing
In folds the sand absorbed
everything and returned all it
could not consume, absorbed
It gave back nothing, semblance

114

*Beyond waves,
reaching far, the
cuckoo's song.*

I kept my shoes on, so as not to presume
appearances

LIT

49

Huy Dao

John Hennessy

Summer, That Protestant Verb

Start here



John Hennessy

Shaved Head

Start here



John Hennessy

My Mother Explains

Start here

LIT



John Hennessy

Eviction Song

Start here

LIT



John Hennessy

Will Esposito

Elephant

possesses the little lime heart of the
forest has been walking in for a long time
the small white ember over your house this evening has been
welcoming
me
getsu
or tsuki and stumbling
along the road toward
but this is the big city and we've been having so much fun
for instance
we took our shirts off
he
here he said have this nectarine it was so good that night in
he put his arms around my arms
and both of us in our brown coats
were walking from the museum to the harbor
and language
and
ladder tied to the curtain and the sill
I watched the delicate burial of tokyo
we were holding hands
their rose jaws working in an antique
way

Ode

You have not listened
or you haven't listened
light as air the movie

falls over the words
not to appear on the ground
in his sleep a schedule of

sheaves with green letters
and the sky yellow-green.
No! Orpheus said you have

not listened and like the
cave the musicians inside it
it hurts a little

whom do I want to tell
it was empty I mean it was
like something dry

which gathers

O today throw yourself at those
tables like papers like a great
fire and the panting
Red Cross stations

LIT

54

Will Esposito

LIT

55

Will Esposito

Ellis Avery

From *The Smoke Week: Sept. 11-21, 2001*

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Tuesday, September 11, 2001

At First Sight

I walked out of the K-Mart and saw the sky, a perfect September blue. And crossing it, a black cloud of smoke, roiling right to left over Lafayette Street. The city couldn't have decided to burn poor Kate Millet out of her apartment on the Bowery, because the cloud was blowing the wrong way, but something very near was on fire, judging from the amount of smoke. *It's at Broadway and Houston*, I guessed, a block over and eight down. Was the Angelika Theater burning?

I looked around for an explanation. No one else was even looking up. Then a man walked quickly by, talking into his cell phone. *A plane just crashed into the World Trade Center*, he said.

But that's thirty blocks away. What a sick joke, I thought, but I trotted after him and tugged his sleeve. *Is it true?* I asked.

Yeab, he said, and kept moving. I had my copies to pick up, so I bought a hot chocolate and stayed where I was, under the black cube sculpture on Astor Place. Would anyone else notice the smoke?

Most didn't. The early light fell on hundreds of faces, as people thronged toward Broadway or poured down stairs to get on subways. Men pushed brooms or carried briefcases, girls hiked up their school uniforms. Campaigners dressed in their Election Day best passed out flyers for the mayoral primary. Guys in a van honked at guys in a car. Women jogged, adding those funny running-in-place steps at the crosswalks. And one college student, a throwback to 1999, pushed, pushed, pushed down Lafayette on her little silver scooter, sundress fluttering, her face in the sun like hot new glass. Astor Place was like an Edward Hopper painting, its anomalous broad bright spaces teeming on this perfectly blue September day. A few people, mostly with cell phones, stared up at the blossoming horror, a few pointed. And one woman ran, throbbing down the block, her nice work scarf surging from side to side. I could see the whites of her eyes from across the street.

Of course I had to pick up my copies. I was like the others: hostage to my so-called future. We were still swaddled in the old world, and she had burst through to the new.

September 11

Two Seconds

After Akiko called, I went out to get food. When I left, the north tower was standing, a body with a sawn-open chest and flaming heart. I heard the sirens screaming down Second Avenue and still trusted that the firefighters could save it.

I bought a gallon of water, a liter of seltzer, frozen shrimp dumplings (should the stove and fridge still work), a bag of baby carrots, three yogurts, two vegetable juices, one orange juice, and a box of crackers. And, because they might be my last, I bought treats: a tub of cashew butter, a Toblerone, fresh figs. I found a box of candles for sale and I got that too.

As I filled my baskets, I saw a very small child systematically touching every candy bar while a woman's urgent voice called *Lucy! Lucy!* The woman finally apprehended her child with a quick shake. *I turn my back for two seconds and what happens?*

Like a bug-eyed Yuppie survivalist, I stood with my heavy baskets behind a man placidly buying a single bag of chips, behind Lucy and her mother buying a juice box and salad greens. I felt like that lone running woman on Astor Place.

When I walked outside twenty people were crowded on the sidewalk around a television and someone was filming them. And when I went home a man looked me in the eye without a leer. *Isn't this awful?* his face said. I felt singed by his compassion.

And when I got to the top of the stairs and looked out the window, the north tower was gone.

September 11

Veronica's Veil

Stunned and inefficient, but grateful for the task, we made a salad for dinner with Liz and Tom and their three sons. Sam, at ten, was meditative and cour-

teous. David, at eight, wanted to know, *Why didn't they evacuate the second tower once the first tower got hit? How many people were in there?*

Isaac, the six-year-old, had had a stroke three years before. *Purple is my favorite color*; he announced periodically. Or, reaching vaguely for me, he'd say, *Your shirt is soft*.

We took hands and Liz's family said a quick grace in Hebrew over the soup, salad, cheese, bread. My eyes welled up again. *We are the ones who turn food into heat, I thought. We are the living.*

Liz said, *What we need to do now is understand what it is about this country that makes other people hate us so much, to see if there's some other way we can be in the world.*

When the children went to sleep, we watched the late news. Peter Jennings tripped over himself, exhausted. The buildings exploded again and again on replay; clouds of paper fluttered from the blooming flames. *That's all asbestos insulation in there*, Tom muttered. Blocks of paper and mud. The first two hundred firefighters who'd arrived on the scene were dead. Tom Brokaw was stuck in London, where it was early Wednesday morning. He held up five or six British early papers for the camera, one at a time. And five or six times there they were, just as I'd seen them out the window: the burning towers and the black coils of smoke.

The island of disbelief inside me vanished. I didn't make it up. This was no New York mass hysteria. What we saw was real, was photographable, was being seen around the world. I sobbed.

It was appalling to me that somewhere in the world it wasn't Tuesday anymore.

Friday, September 14 The Cruellest Day

We woke to rain. *The rest of Manhattan won't catch fire now*, I thought, *but the rubble will be heavier*. Pouring water on a campfire makes it smoke: I thought about people trapped under the buildings, dying of smoke inhalation. I thought about two hundred and twenty floors' worth of asbestos drizzling out to sea, working its way up the food chain. I went back to sleep.

Sharon worked at home that morning, and I made phone calls. I called old lovers, or called friends they still talked to. I called to find out about my uncle on Long Island. My cousin said they were all fine, but named more

missing from her town than I could let myself hear. She mentioned Nostradamus; we had both seen the same TV special as children. And here it was, as frightening as poetry: a sea of ghost ships. A sea of empty cars in commuter lots, long after midnight Tuesday.

Then I called my uncle who lives in Connecticut. I heard unspeakable loss in the soft way he asked, *Are you getting everything you need down there? Bottled water?*

We went to the Quaker meeting house at noon, but it was closed. A sign directed us to the Episcopal church next door.

Everyone approaches God in their own way, said the minister. He was hoarse, and asked someone else to lead the song, *My Country 'Tis of Thee*. The words were soap and ashes in my mouth, but I sang. And then I wept in my pew, because I searched in my heart and heard no God.

I had believed, until then, in that Quaker divine spark in each person, but I hadn't thought that was God in his or her entirety. But with desperate clarity I saw how small a spark is, a thing doused with wet fingers. A thing crushed underfoot. I saw what Annie Dillard sees: a tiny God, a brittle God, a moth, helpless but for our crude and preoccupied hands.

The minister invited people to stand and speak, if they wished. A woman started preaching, *The Risen Christ, The Risen Christ, The Risen Christ*. We left. When we walked outside, it was raining. There was a green wall that looked fresh and wet against the silty sky. Pretty, I said.

Remember that miso cod we had at Nobu? Their Signature Hot Dish?

The taste of salt cod and sweet miso belonged to a world I could only picture as if through the wrong side of a pair of binoculars. *You want to try to make that again?*

Well, not today, said Sharon. She was quiet for a long moment. *But those hamantaschen you brought to Princeton were good. Where'd you get them?*

Moishe's, down the street.

Really?

Moishe's was open. The two women, gray and silent on Tuesday, were talking again today, weighing cookies and opening bags.

I didn't know Moishe's was so good. Remember that big dusty cookie of theirs Neil brought us? That was not their Signature Hot Dish.

I laughed out loud for the first time in three days, as a black SUV made an abrupt and sloppy turn onto our street.

Hey, watch out for pedestrians! Sharon shook her fist.

I guess they're letting traffic below Fourteenth Street, I said.

April is the cruelest month, you'll see, in large italic type, floating across the pages of every spring catalog: Godiva, Victoria's Secret, J.Crew. Do they care what it means?

It's the Friday after the world ended on a Tuesday.

It's this: wincing back to life again.

Michael Schiavo

As Oarsmen Paddle

Out on the grand waterways that carve the land,
Out of various oxbows and bays, into darkened
Homes, something approaching you, who said
(As if saying good-bye), "My name means springtime."
So that became my goal, my only covenant.
I let lapse my membership in the Future Farmers
Of America when their latest policy report
Instructed us to raise only exotic fruit. The thread
Has unraveled before anything could be sewn,
Before even your most native tendencies could rise.
And all for some netherworld of majestic
Fantasias—we needn't have it nor the no.
In that night I first met you, I thought
The world had ended. And it had. And it does.

LIT

60

Ellis Avery

LIT

61

Michael Schiavo

Michael Schiavo

Your Pristine Fangs

It's raining as you read this. In Vermont, a memoirist
Finds the disposable camera you lost
And incorporates its contents into her penultimate chapter,
Those pictures of us before the slaughter.
With only the sea to answer to, with every
Cover curled by the breeze, your memory
Suddenly asks for revision. We both have the facts
On our side. One night you dream the way people act
Is some elaborate prank: they all truly
Want and miss you, and are trying to find a way
To tell you so. In fact, every single man you meet
Reminds you. Skyscrapers are gone from your street;
That bookstore is gone. All that's left are hangdog boys
Parading about your feet, spouting an expertise
That remains incomplete.

LIT

62

Michael Schiavo

Geof Huth

Title

LIT

63

Geof Huth

Bruce Smith

Stir

I have so little time to speak to you,
and yet I have ten minus two

years off for good behavior left on the sentence,
so forever. It feels urgent and suspended

to be here: a laundered moonscape
painted with antiseptic and rape

and noise and crimes we love
to tell ourselves, to feel. *We feel of*

not *in* the world, which is how we felt
when we walked and the world melted

by our rage into waxy splotches of color—
it was the drugs talkin’—and the horror

of memory when the drugs got quiet.
I talk as if I had infinite

time. That’s how dumb I am,
but not stupid. I signed up for program.

It was either art or god.
I took art because god

was an ex-con’s absolution for my sins
and I did not want to be forgiven.

So I copied stuff: the beautiful, although most cons
were drawing angels with big tits or dragons

which is coked-up tattoo art without the rush.
I wanted to get to it, to brush

the violence into submission
like petting the mane of a lion.

OK, I think in confined ways
(I’m confined) when I want to say

I know how I got here
and sorry and the line I draw on paper

is the rent in the veil
and towards you my tunnel.

LIT

64

Bruce Smith

LIT

65

Bruce Smith

Jennifer L. Knox

Mastering the Lesson of Odds

Congratulations, Uncle George, but one good day
At the dog track and a yo-yo don't make candy
For dinner OK. Muncie Man dropped by today he did
And hissed all red face through the deadbolt:
"Georgie's waltzed his last one, kid." No shit
You're already planning to sneak out and leave us
All night alone again but mother gave you fifty bucks
To babysit and buy groceries and plus you promised: "No
Horseshit I swear to fucking Christ this time, Irene." But fourteen years
I've heard you blah blah blah. Reading you's like reading in a car:
All that jumping around gives me a headache. You even run
Like chickenshit, and you'll never be anything but the same
Big pussy what fucked up all our birthday parties: showing up
Wasted, shaky and late, blubbering into your steak—you, your
Prince Valiant haircut, and them sissy-ass baby-blue pants.

Why We Came and Why We Stayed

No mystery there—we needed the dough.
It was 1956, and door-to-door salesmen
gigs were tougher to stumble on than dodos.
Sally'd always been a twitchy thing—and I loved it
in bed, but before the caretakers'd even chained
the gate, she was wincing and whimpering anytime
an ember'd go pop in the always-roaring fireplace—
in broad daylight yet—and somehow, right then, I knew
my white-gloved, bird-boned, wide-eyed wife was
a goner. Maybe I'd known all along—years before we'd loosened
the big red blob of wax with its stamped-in thorn-covered X
holding the invitation's tongue down—definitely
by the time our host pulled a no-show at dinner
and sent "his deepest regrets" to stand in. Sure I knew
and said, "You sleep with the girls tonight, darling—

you'll be safer that way." I knew all along
and now we all know "Someone's Got to Pay"
was that prom's theme, but Sally, poor kid,
never knew her dad'd even driven a school bus,
much less drunk, off a cliff, and killed 32 kids.
A lot of people hated her, I know that too, but do you
know why she shrieked and flopped around like that?
Because Life told her life was a straight line leading straight
off the 405 to a split-level ranch house in Van Nuys but
they lied—about everything: how it looked, the stuff inside,
my name, her name, but especially
its address, which turned out to be at the end of a long
red hallway lined with stuffed, hunted heads.
All we gave the Ol' Sal to help her find her way
back from the bathroom was a cheap-o sputtering flashlight
and one super-doozy of a nightie.

LIT

66

Jennifer L. Knox

LIT

67

Jennifer L. Knox

Spring and Still Some Short

We are four little lambs
made entirely of daisies
and today we are having a party

on top of the river—the Old Man’s chest—
as he sneezes thawed fishes
and wheezes our shed under-fleece.

Counting; start again; start counting
Again: we tried arranging the hamrolls
kitty-corner to the cupcakes

as well as adjacent to the cheese—
but dem poor old hamrolls,
they just keep rollin’ along.

And with only one plastic fork left,
we’ll give the oxen a raincheck
and tell the peahens: Skedaddle!

Deep in the crimped paper plates
of our hearts, daisies beneath the daisies
fade as the daisies make daisies and daisies...

So look deep in our green glass eyes
at the sties, and at the lop-
sided moths on our noses.

Jim Behrle The Day Sugar Was Born

mounted and winking like a grid

establishments burp into the backseats of Cadillacs

bells ring to quelch the sleep

make an opera out of our children

maneuvered violently into kilts

your bladder his aquarium

turf to turn knees into an affront

had enough of your public bone

another diner makes a napkin run

your world a motel in the woods

all a part of your vivid premonitions

LIT

68

Jennifer L. Knox

LIT

69

Jim Behrle

A Fire in the Eyes of a Fire-Colored House

you think that's dangerous? try
sucking a lavender proton until
your bones get imaginary

he lingers as if broken in the hills
far from the juice of fame

they designed you a bridge and an island

you put your skull through the wash

inside your mouth was a basement

you think that's dangerous? try
snorting the new glass solution

for antidotes to invasions

when the storm came you howled, too
clef of a body curled like a body horn

you stole new bodies and also ruined them

Ted Mathys The Demolition

Derby requires that the car be stripped of glass, have a governor on the motor, pyrotechnic tailpipe, dolled-up with duct tape, racing stripe, dice on the dash, lucky number, flame retardant, driver with helmet and a conception of history as the pagan saga of sex and warfare. The difference between those two being nearly negligible, see Hector's battle gear shine like a magnesium fire, see him bludgeon a Greek then lick his scarlet finger like a Blow Pop, see uncle Russ in boots heaving a sledge into the windshield to prepare his Derby car, see us grunt with sweat as we swing, hear the plash of shattering glass, hear a deep-throated laugh, see Rome and in it a slave fucking Nero with her hand around his throat, see us take it too far, swinging at the tires, the fenders, doors, roof, off in the distance see the saliva gathering in the corner of how many mouths, see the man behind the wheel of a functioning car ask if I could maybe fulfill a high school fantasy of his then look crotch-ward and say "take it out," see the diorama of plastic paratroopers strewn across the pasture and the boy trotting off toward the woods, see the protester insert the long stem of a daisy into the barrel of the Marine's rifle, hear the announcer announcing the Derby lineup, whiff the raw funk of goat and funnel cake, see us not present at the Grandstand's arena of wetted dirt, see us still in the scrambled field of noxious weeds, swinging our heavy pendulums, see the body of the car, see the body battered, tear it down, down, down, feel no remorse.

LIT

70

Jim Behrle

LIT

71

Ted Mathys

Katey Nicosia

Nobody Could Hold Herself Miniature for Long

She confessed
to putting the toy world first
a plastic bride
a speck piano

now a lake
plural birds and birth
her genitals
resemble opera

now she knows her dolls
don't actually use
their dollhouse kitchen

fate with scissors
her roof will leak tomorrow
the bigness of a sparrow

Things That Are Handled

The edge opens things
which means I too might wait
docked in the niche of error,
the corner it forces. Like a nod
and simultaneous no, a space
to poke a finger through.

I think of my mother
fixed in bead and string,
the shape her hands make
in pulling a knot not tight enough.

That's a tunnel, there,
home to what's clasped,
maybe worn. Where curls
of smoke tail the high wall,
there's a cough in the general air.

It stands for knowing
when to leave the room
and walk the wind of a sail,
a sail in all types of rain.

LIT

72

Katey Nicosia

LIT

73

Katey Nicosia

Melanie Figg

Psalm Somatic 4

You've been dreaming in fragments all summer & I am

a screen for

your flickering light, your moving forth—

light accelerates as it returns to me, skimming

the white arms & holding on. You always
want me obscured so your lovers are dark, unreadable—

You, all chatter & boss, slicing—

I used to be so lovely

& was ignored then, too—it's not difficult, collapsing into the space that surrounds
me. You find this difficult.

15 years is more than a lifetime. 15 years is nothing to trees. If I am

a shell to you, why have you never cupped me to your listening ear?

You single-minded monster—come dance with me—

I am not a vessel

I am not a beautiful husk for you to hang your hang-ups on—

I am the lining of this world. If god broke through

it would be wine, the sweat in the crook of a lover's

neck as she leans back & lets you believe

for a moment that there is a way in, that love is borderless & indigo—

a dome of stars that opens into deeper rooms of light—milky & borderless—

Don't Be There—Be That

•

When our mother died we finally became the same thing

You missed her as I have always missed her— & for a while we moved as one:

no eating, no sleeping, only awake, but no waking—

Ragged with grief you finally understood

in those first years without her, those years when I returned
to the body of a twelve-year-old girl with memories of how he used to—

*let's get really fat, you whispered to me, so that doesn't keep happening,
let's ride memory as hard as I ride you—*

come on, come on—

•

You began when you learned the diagnosis—I began much earlier than that. The disease entered me

abruptly & casually
like family

You talk about knowing, you talk about warfare & positive imagery—

All I know is that homing device you put in my chest for years, that rotting leather
knot dead center & wrapped in twine blocking blood flow / blocking blue sky, that
evil magnet that called his hand to come—

You thought of forgiveness as an economy

& that if you bent his back in penance you would honor that girl, that pigeon,

that beautiful thing that got left behind—

But you can't build a nest in those remains—

people make mistakes—& sometimes their hands are so big
they can put out the light in a girl.

for years it can put out the light—

I accelerate the light that moves through me. I love—diffusing.

Walking is a holy act, she said, it sieves the sun—

Be That & I was & he cried & the blue sky was a place for him to confess in—

there was a hot spinning in the center room,
the door finally ajar,

all & only blue sky—there, where I greeted him—

Sara Kaplan

Another Salut

I'll never see you again.

Sentimentality would utter:
rivers, mountains, hail, and lice...

All things apart keep us, truly.

Efforts can never relax,
if minds must constantly meet
without a body to recall
how it is to see you walk.
It's important, apparently.

I've left five places in my life
where I spent at least a year.
And none have I seen again
where the people see me merely
as a visitor, once removed.

This ends as a chemist stops pouring,
knows his product is complete.

Michael Robbins

Far candle

Sent to know of the silent wood
tenants of earthfall, confiscation under
secular pretenses of [line broken off]
The tides which from afar candle
irregular descant of airships,
crash toward [...] eliminate
class distinctions, I can, he said,
only dream of so many at one time,
the leafy shelter of the Skralings.
It was for your sake the smoke the salt
surrendered spelled nothing at least
nothing this graphite hearth
[six lines missing] birthdays of dead kings.
So you will walk a mile in this polymath's
sand tonight, anent which it is said
even the gods [have suffered] to learn the only
way to fall is down a rabbit hole or
some other kind of hole, or possibly
there is no burial in that northern ground.
The pole star is visible despite the lamps
of burning city-states, and we can steer
our drowsy boats into that fantastic harbor
[unintelligible] never to thatch huts again
[unknown number of pages used as fuel for cooking fires]
drinks cool spring water from an earthen jar.
And without it, at the solstice's dire genuflect,
we are as one who, composing a hymn,

Sept

Dear laundry thing

it's not dangerous without you.
Sorry to have found you.

*like a bright red snowflake
like daylight in a drawer*

Belgravia & the squares
have their north room
where pirate rays never reach.

Signed,

july august sept
ember octave novena

LIT

80

Michael Robbins

LIT

81

Michael Robbins

Sean McNally

Get to Know Your Presidential Pets! (1)

George Washington kept ten hounds: Mopsey, Taster, Cloe, Forester, Captain, Lady, Rover, Vulcan, Searcher, and Sweetlips. Washington called everyone Sweetlips, in much the manner contemporary politicians refer to one another as Professor Bungeecord or Doctor Satanicus.

James Monroe had a no-name spaniel, as Congress had already allocated the names Mister Peepers, Patty Paws, and Señor Sassy.

John Quincy Adams was gifted an alligator by the Marquis de Lafayette, which resided for a time in a bathroom in the East Wing. He also kept silkworms. Did you notice his middle name was Quincy? What more would you expect from someone named Quincy who consorts with a Marquis?

Martin Van Buren kept tiger cubs, William Henry Harrison a goat and a cow. Andrew Johnson had mice, the mice had lice, and everyone knows that mice are twice as nice with lice.

Get to know your presidential pets!

Get to Know Your Presidential Pets! (2)

Teddy Roosevelt had horses, snakes, cats, parrots, bears, a lion, a hyena and a wildcat, a coyote, a zebra and a barn owl, assorted lizards, guinea pigs, rats and roosters, a pit bull terrier named Pete, plus four pups not named Pete, and a horned toad called Bill. He kept them under his hat.

Harding kept canaries, in case of mining disaster.

Calvin Coolidge had two raccoons named Rebecca and Reuben. They lived in a shed by night, roaming the White House by day. Rabies was all the rage, a craze sweeping the nation.

FDR kept a pair of sparrows tethered to the spokes of his wheelchair, delighting in the noises they'd make as merrily he rolled along.

Get to know your presidential pets!

LIT

82

Sean McNally

LIT

83

Sean McNally

Get to Know Your Presidential Pets! (3)

Eisenhower had a Weimaraner, and that's fun to say. Eisenhower had a Weimaraner. Eisenhower had a Weimaraner.

LBJ kept a sack of wingless wasps he'd dump in Lady Bird's lap at press conferences, but the plucky First Lady was infrequently stung.

Nixon's Checkers is well known, less so is the human leg he kept in a cage to which he'd spend many a night softly singing his dreams for the nation.

Reagan had a sharpened piece of wood named Jabby.

Clinton was criticized for mashing mealybugs with a fork.

Bush Jr., like Sr., has an earthenware pot filled with screams fed fat on the blood of the unborn.

Get to know your presidential pets!

Questions and Podiums (1)

The President stands behind a podium and cannot stop answering questions. The President cannot stop answering questions because he cannot come out from behind the podium. The President cannot come out from behind the podium because he has an obvious erection and is waiting for it to go down. The President stands behind the podium answering question after question because of the obvious erection and the waiting for it to go down, but the erection isn't going down. He wants to leave, he's through answering questions, but he can't very well step away from behind the podium because his obvious erection will not go down.

He answers questions about the foreign situation and about the domestic situation. He answers questions about the public school system, the private school system, highways and byways, taxation. He carries forth on refugees riding the high seas and goes on about the technological marvels of science. He speaks of natural habitats and the salamander found in the water supply. He talks of crime in the streets of Laredo and women in prison. He answers questions and waits for his obvious erection to go down.

Questions and Podiums (2)

LIT

86

Sean McNally

Why does the President have such an obvious erection? What's at the bottom of this whole erection business? Is he thinking of his wife or someone else? Is he thinking of someone famous or a girl back in high school or some photograph he happened to see in passing this morning? And is it necessarily a woman on his mind? There's always rumors and hearsay, but does that mean that a President's erection is in on the joke? Is the obvious erection perhaps a symptom of ongoing or oncoming medical problems? Have doctors been consulted? Or is this just one of those erections that happen to men from time to time, and a fellow simply has to wait for it to go down, podium or no?

The press can tell there's something going on, but can't really tell what it is that's happening to the President. So they just ask questions. They ask about touchy border conflicts, about hostages and obsolete military aircraft. They want to know if illiteracy is on the rise or wane and if the inclement weather is part of a trend. They query about the economy and again with the salamander in the water supply. They go so far as to quiz the President on pop stars of the day and he begins to fear the one question he doesn't want to answer is on its way, the question about his steadfast refusal to leave the podium, to cease all this answering of questions. He's afraid at any moment, some rascal, some wag will cup his hands to his mouth and shout, "Mister President! What's in your pants?"

If an infinite number of reporters have an infinite amount of time to ask the President an infinite number of questions, they will eventually hit on that big question. Podium or no, politics aside, they will eventually ask him. An infinite number of reporters will eventually ask the President, "What's in your pants? Mister President! What's in your pants?"

Robert Polito The Farber Equation

The Farber equation is never simple. That sentence is a variation on a Samuel Beckett line I've wanted to adapt for an essay, review, biography, even poem, ever since I read the original in college. As the opening sentence to his first book Beckett wrote, "The Proustian equation is never simple," and from the outset I was comforted by the promise of persistent, accelerating, perhaps eternal difficulty and puzzle. But as over the years I repeated to myself the sentence, "The Proustian equation is never simple," at the blind start of any obstinate piece of writing, I found myself startled by Beckett's conflation of "Proustian" and "equation": his brisk juxtaposition of involuntary memory and the painstaking working through of quantities and variables.¹

I never found a space for the sentence because the bewilderment the arrival of Beckett's six words in my head customarily signaled turned out always to expose only a lack of preparation or confidence, a private anxiety that refused to intersect the subject at hand. But for Manny Farber's paintings and film criticism, the introductory oddities, muddles, crises, contradictions, dead ends, multiple alternatives, and divergent vistas spiral along "chains of rapport and intimate knowledge" (to quote his *Artforum* essay on Don Siegel) into still more tangled and intractable mysteries; following Beckett on Proust, the Farber equation "creates a sustained, powerful, and lifelike pattern of dissonance" (to quote his *City Lights* essay on Preston Sturges) that insists on insinuating the steeped-in-time personal and sensual alongside the abstractly intellectual, formal, and conceptual.²

For much of his writing life Farber was branded an advocate merely of action films and B-movie—as though it might not be distinction enough to

This essay also appears in the catalog published on the occasion of the retrospective exhibition *Manny Farber: About Face*. The exhibition originated at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, and travels to P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York in fall 2004.

¹ Samuel Beckett's 1931 *Proust* as reprinted in the (then) complete edition of his writings: (New York: Grove Press, 1970).

² All quotations from Manny Farber's 1971 *Negative Space* come from the expanded later edition: (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998).

LIT

87

Robert Polito

have been the first American critic to propose serious appreciations of Howard Hawks, Samuel Fuller, William Wellman, Raoul Walsh, and Anthony Mann. Yet Farber resisted many noir films of the 1940s as inflated and mannerist—"Over the past couple of years, one movie after another has been filled with low-key photography," he complained in 1952, "shallow perspectives, screwy pantomime, ominously timed action, hollow-sounding vices." Farber also was among the first critics to write about Rainer Werner Fassbinder, an early champion of Werner Herzog, and an exponent of such experimental directors as Michael Snow, George Kuchar, Andy Warhol, and Chantal Akerman. *Village Voice* film critic J. Hoberman told me that upon discovering Farber in college, he was "stunned by how eclectic Farber was, how wide-ranging his references were. I wasn't that interested in commercial films. I was interested in underground movies, the French new wave, and such B-movies as existed. I would read Andrew Sarris, I would read Kael, but I felt they were operating from a different perspective—whereas Farber seemed to me to be a much hipper intellect."³ As Hoberman quipped in the introduction to his collection *Vulgar Modernism*, Farber played "both ends off against the middlebrow."⁴

Still, Farber's notoriety as a film critic largely resides in his B-Movie-steeped, careering slams of the fifties and sixties—"The Gimp" (for *Commentary*, 1952), "Underground Films" (also for *Commentary*, 1957) "Hard Sell Cinema" (for *Perspectives*, 1957), and particularly "White Elephant Art vs. Termite Art" (for *Film Culture*, 1962). The termite/white elephant essay cashiered "masterpiece art, reminiscent of the enameled tobacco humidors and wooden lawn ponies bought at white elephant auctions decades ago." White elephant directors "blow up every situation and character like an affable inner tube with recognizable details and smarmy compassion" or "pin the viewer to the wall and slug him with wet towels of artiness and significance." Farber instead tracked the termite artist: "[O]rnerly, wasteful, stubbornly self-involved, doing go-for-broke art and not caring what comes of it." Termite art (or "termite-fungus-centipede art," as he also tagged it) is "an act both of observing and being in the world, a journeying in which the artist seems to be ingesting both material of his art and the outside world through horizontal coverage." Against the white elephant "pursuit

³ Manny Farber, interview by author, September, 2002.

⁴ J. Hoberman, *Vulgar Modernism: Writing on Movies and Other Media* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

of continuity, harmony," termite art mainly inheres in moments—" [A] few spots of tingling, jarring excitement" in a Cezanne painting "where he nibbles away at what he calls his 'small sensation'"; John Wayne's "hipster sense of how to sit in a chair leaned against a wall" in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*; and "one unforgettably daring image" in *Jules et Jim*, "kids sniffing the bicycle seat just vacated by the girl in the typical fashion of voyeuristic pornographic art."

Farber's attention to vivifying details and gestures over the encrusted masterwork reminds me of Robert Frost in his *Paris Review* interview. "The whole thing is performance and prowess and feats of association," Frost asserted of his poems. "Why don't critics talk about those things—what a feat it was to turn that that way, and what a feat it was to remember that, to be reminded of that by this."⁵ Farber similarly personalized his termite/white elephant division for the introduction to *Negative Space*: "The primary reason for the two categories is that all the directors I like...are in the termite range, and no one speaks about them for the qualities I like." As termite artists he indicated a diversity of painters, writers, photographers, producers, and actors, that spanned Laurel and Hardy, Otis Ferguson, Walker Evans, Val Lewton, Clarence Williams, J. R. Williams, Weldon Kees, Margie Israel, Isaac Rosenfield, sometimes James Agee, and film directors Howard Hawks, Raoul Walsh, William Wellman, Samuel Fuller, Anthony Mann, and Preston Sturges.

Manny Farber published his last film essay, "Beyond the New Wave: Kitchen Without Kitsch," in *Film Comment*, in 1977, a few years after he moved from New York to San Diego with his wife, the artist Patricia Patterson, to teach film and painting at the University of California. Among his reasons for abandoning criticism, as he recently told me: "I no longer wanted to be viewed as the film critic who also paints."⁶ In New York Farber traveled among the late 1930s generation of New York writers and critics, many aligned with the *Partisan Review*—Clement Greenberg, Agee, Saul Bellow, Jean Stafford, Mary McCarthy, Kees, and Ferguson, among others. For his reviews and essays for the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, *Time*, *Commentary*, *Commonweal*, the *New Leader*, *Cavalier*, *Artforum*, and *City Magazine*, Farber tracked obvious and enduring affinities particularly with

⁵ The Robert Frost interview appeared in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, edited by George Plimpton (New York: Viking, 1963).

⁶ Farber, interview by author, August, 2002.

Ferguson, Agee, and Greenberg. Yet Farber's approach to the actual writing could not be more divergent, incongruous, idiosyncratic, perverse. Where Greenberg aimed at what might be styled an elegant lucidity, even as he traced the destruction of representation, and Ferguson and Agee offered distinctive variations on conversational lyricism—Ferguson tilting toward twenties jazz, Agee canting into rhapsody—Farber is perhaps the only American critic of modernism to write as a modernist. He emerged as the boldest and most literary of film and art critics of the 1940s and '50s by coursing along almost stridently anti-literary tangents. Farber advanced a topographical prose that aspired termite fashion through fragmentation, parody, allusions, multiple focus, and clashing dictions to engage the formal spaces of the new films and paintings he admired.

His friend the late Pauline Kael condescended slightly to Farber during a *Cineaste* interview, remarking, "It's his analysis of the film frame as if it were a painter's canvas that's a real contribution."⁷ Farber could direct painterly thoughtfulness to issues such as color in Disney cartoons or slackness of camera in Hollywood features as far back as his first *New Republic* reviews, and always in his criticism references from film and art crisscross and trespass. Still, the correspondences in Farber's film criticism and his paintings are more radical and strategic. During nearly all the years he actively wrote criticism Farber worked as an abstract artist—as a painter, sculptor, and the creator of gallery installations and monumental oils on collaged paper.⁸ But after he moved to San Diego, Farber shifted to representational paintings—a profusion of candy bars, stationary, film titles, film directors, and domestic still lifes—and soon discontinued his film writing. Characteristically these new paintings are multifocused and decentered. Intense detailing arrests the eye amid spiraling chains of association: visual, cultural, or personal. They sometimes imply narratives, but without positing the entrances, exits, and arcs of any particular preexistent story lines. Despite their subjects, these works can hardly be mistaken for Pop—yet for all their conceptual focus on the medium, or on art history, they aren't abstract either.

Farber's paintings import film dynamics, but paradoxically. The controlling intelligence of an auteur director atomizes into a profusion of stories

⁷ "I Still Love Going to Movies: An Interview with Pauline Kael," by Leonard Quart, *Cineaste*, 25, no. 2 (2000).

⁸ Farber's 1969 articles on the films of his friend Michael Snow offer, I believe, thoughtful parallels to the monumental oils on collaged paper of the early 1970s. See "Canadian Underground" and "Michael Snow" in *Negative Space*.

and routes; much as with an interactive e-book, a viewer can enter a painting only by realigning the givens. But in Farber's film criticism, I want to suggest, is a prediction of the painter he would become. Certain revered film directors—Hawks, Wellman, Sturges, Lewton, Don Siegel, Jean-Luc Godard, Robert Bresson, Warhol, Fassbinder—arise from the essays almost as self-portraits of that future painter. The painter Farber will be is forecast in his observations and descriptions of his favorite directors, actors, and film moments, but also (and more vividly) in his writing style.

Farber once described his prose style as "a struggle to remain faithful to the transitory, multisuggestive complication of a movie image and/or negative space." No other film critic has written so inventively or flexibly from inside the moment of a movie. His writing can appear to be composed exclusively of digressions from an absent center. One of his standard moves is a bold qualification of a qualification, in a sequence of vivid repositionings. His strategies mix self-suspicion, retreat, digression, and mulish persistence, so that Farber (once more Beckett-like) often proceeds as if giving up and pressing on simultaneously. There are rarely introductory overviews or concluding summaries, his late reviews in particular spurn plot summaries and might not even name the director of a film, and transitions seem interchangeable with non sequiturs. Puns, jokes, lists, snaky metaphors, and webs of allusions supplant arguments. Farber wrenches nouns into verbs (Hawks, he writes, "landscapes action"), and sustains strings of divergent, perhaps irreconcilable adjectives such that praise can look inseparable from censure. *Touch of Evil*, he writes, is "basically the best movie of Welles's cruddy middle peak period." He will cast prickly epigrams—"Huston is unable to countenance the possibility of every gentleman being a murderer at heart, preferring instead every murderer being a gentleman at heart." His sentences will dazzle through layers of poise and charm:

What's so lyrical about the ending [of Don Siegel's *The Lineup*], in San Francisco's Sutro Museum, is the Japanese-print compositions, that late afternoon lighting, the advantage taken of the long hallways, multilevel stairways, in a baroque, elegant, glass-palace building with an exposed skating rink, nautical museum, and windows facing the sea with eye-catching boulders.

But Farber *qua* Farber typically arrives at a kind of backdoor poetry: not "lyrical," or traditionally poetic, but original and startling. This is Farber on *How I Won the War*: "At its best, it has a crawling-along-the-earth cantan-

kerousness and cruddiness, as though the war against fascism were being glimpsed by a cartooned earthworm on a fake hillbilly spread somewhere in the Carolinas." Or here he famously invokes the "underground" theaters along 1950s Manhattan's 42nd Street:

The hard-bitten action film finds its natural home in caves: the murky congested theaters, looking like glorified tattoo parlors on the outside and located near bus terminals in big cities. These theaters roll action films in what, at first, seems like a nightmarish atmosphere of shabby transience, prints that seem overgrown with jungle moss, sound tracks infected with hiccups. The spectator watches two or three action films go by and leaves feeling as though he were a pirate discharged from a giant sponge.

Many of these writerly aspects are on display in Farber's magnificent Hawks piece, originally published in *Artforum* in 1969. The essay manages neither a welcoming preface nor a resolving conclusion—the start and finish are all canny abruptness. The first four long paragraphs compose a docket, or roster—one Hawks film for each paragraph. Farber situates Hawks inside a vast allusive complex—Piero's religious paintings, cubist composing, Breughel, F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Tolkein, Muybridge, Walker Evans, and Robert Frank; almost a kind of collage of allusive appropriation. Many phrases anticipate Farber's later paintings: "secret preoccupation with linking," "builds detail upon detail into a forbidding whirlwind," "each bumping into the other in an endless interplay," "many plots are interwoven," "the idea of topping, outmaneuvering," "intricately locked humor," "the ingenuity of its pragmatic engineering," and "the geography of gesture." And, rare for Farber's prose, there is an explicit autobiographical reference—to the border town of his birthplace. The seaport in *Only Angels Have Wings* might be good, he writes, for a Douglas, Arizona, high school production.

In *A Dandy's Gesture* (1977), one of two paintings focused on Hawks, Farber—using toys and miniatures—glances at images from the films: an airplane crashing into a chocolate candy mountain, from *Only Angels Have Wings*; a tiger, from *Bringing Up Baby*; an elephant, from *Hatari!*; a boat, from *To Have and Have Not*; and newspaper layout pages, from *His Girl Friday*, with gangster Johnny Lovo (from *Scarface*) in the headline. But by following the train scooting down the track on the left of the painting to a notebook, we discover Farber slyly inserting himself into the painting. A little reporter's pad quotes his own notes for his film class on Hawks at UC San Diego. What might be the lines connecting a director at work in the Hollywood studio

system and a painter at work in a university—here, cramming for a lecture; or, perhaps, not cramming, but painting *A Dandy's Gesture* instead? Who is the gestural dandy of the title? Howard Hawks? Or Farber himself?

Hawks is only the courtliest of these projections of Farber's future paintings. From his inaugural review for the *New Republic* on February 2, 1942, Farber insisted on a multiplicity of expression and form, criticizing a Museum of Modern Art exhibition where each artist "has his one particular response to experience, and no matter what the situation, he has one means of conceiving it on canvas.... Which is all in the way of making a plea for more flexibility in painting and less dogma." Long before he started to collaborate with Patricia Patterson on his film writing, Farber managed to insinuate a sense of multiple perspectives, even multiple voices into his critical prose—his *New Republic* and *Nation* columns often found him so insistently mixed as to suggest (at least) a pair of contrary authors; subsequent pieces review disparate films, and discuss them all at once. Among Farber's last solo pieces was his anti-auteurist "The Subverters" for *Cavalier*, in July 1966, the summer photographer Helen Levitt introduced him to Patricia:

One of the joys in moviegoing is worrying over the fact that what is referred to as Hawks might be Jules Furthman, that behind the Godard film is the looming shape of Raoul Coutard, and that when people talk about Bogart's "peculiarly American" brand of scarred sophisticated cynicism they are really talking about what Ida Lupino, Ward Bond or even Stepin Fetchit provided in unmistakable scene-stealing moments.

His Preston Sturges essay (*City Lights*, 1954, cowritten with W. S. Poster) etches a variant on Farber's nostalgia-for-the-future self-portraits. After remarking "the almost aboriginal Americanism" of the character actors in Sturges's comedies, he celebrates the director for his "multiple focus," "fragmented action," "high-muzzle velocity," "easy handling of multiple cinematic meanings," and "this modern cinematic perspective of mobility seen by a mobile observer." Echoing his first *New Republic* article, he surmises, "It is also probable that [Sturges] found the consistency of serious art, its demand that everything be resolved in terms of a logic of a single mood, repugnant to his temperament and false to life." Still more closely intuiting his own distant paintings, Farber wrote: "Basically, a Sturges film is executed to give one the delighted sensation of a person moving on a smoothly traveling vehicle going at high speed through fields, towns, homes, even through other vehi-

cles. The vehicle in which the spectator is traveling never stops but seems to be moving in a circle, making its journey again and again in an ascending, narrowing spiral until it diminishes into nothingness.” Farber would eventually quote fragments of his Sturges essay on a note pad he sketched into his “auteur” painting, *The Lady Eve* (1976-77).

Raoul Walsh materializes as another stand-in for the painter—“Walsh’s style is based on traveling over routes”—as do other such “underground” filmmakers as Wellman and Mann, who open up a scene “by roadmapped strategies that play movement against space in a cunning way, building the environment and event before your eyes.” By the early 1970s, and his joint productions with Patricia Patterson, Farber’s surrogates are not limited to action directors, nor are the directors only American. On Godard: “His is basically an art of equal emphasis...Dissociation. Or magnification of the molehill against the mountain, or vice versa...the words becoming like little trolley-car pictures passing back and forth.” On Herzog: “[T]he awkward framing, unpredictable camera positions...the droll, zestful, looming work of a filmmaker still on the prowl, making an exploratory work each time out.” On Fassbinder: “[A] kind of lurching serpentine....” Buñuel conjures Farber’s future paintings, but acidly, from inside a dark mirror:

Each movie is a long march through small connected events (dragged out distressingly to the last moment: just getting the movie down the wall from a candle to a crucifix takes more time than an old silent comedy), but it is the sinister fact of a Buñuel movie that no one is going anywhere and there is never any release at the end of the film. It’s one snare after another, so that people get wrapped around themselves in claustrophobic whirlpool patterns.

Many of these directors, along with Sam Peckinpah, Wim Wenders, Budd Boetticher, Jean-Marie Straub, Marguerite Duras, and Eric Rohmer, would prompt “auteur” paintings from Farber during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The witty, devastating *Roads and Tracks* (1981) issues from films of William Wellman, shadowing inversions and reversals. At the top of the canvas, the staid women falling (or jumping?) from airplanes, for instance, are from *Wings*; they immediately transform into angels, probably in a punning reference to Hawk’s *Only Angels Have Wings*. In a counter image to the angels, near the bottom center of the painting, a modern pop-tart woman in a bathing suit pops up from a glass. The cowboy stomping the man on the tracks at the lower right is from *The Oxbow Incident*, while the tracks them-

selves arrive courtesy of a favorite Wellman film of Farber’s, *Other Men’s Women*, a love triangle among railroad roustabouts, with many scenes set in a kitchen (hence the butter, the corn cob, the lettuce, and bottles). The appearance of James Cagney with a grapefruit on his face is a twist on the famous scene in *Public Enemy*.

Throughout, crisscrossing tracks and roads frame—and force—an impression of stuttering immobility; for all the alleged motion, they don’t go anywhere. They’re blocked, and destructive. Besides figures from action and war films, the painting is full of cliché, often toy reproductions of ’30s small-town, working class life—a milkman, old advertisements, the houses, cars—and also teasing intimations of a world outside that life: most notably, the art book open to the Indian tantric sex painting by the lower left.

Along and inside the tracks Farber races trains of associations, historical, cultural and private. *Roads and Tracks*, like all of his “auteur” paintings, refutes the notion of any single authorial consciousness—the multi-perspectives of the winding allusions, their various knowledge, visual textures, and experiences, are at once too public and personal for that.

Farber’s “auteur” series flaunts conspicuous links to his film criticism that other paintings will probe ingeniously and boldly. An explosion of the notion of a still life, *Domestic Movies* (1985) likely derives its smart title from the suggestion of time and motion through a tilted perspective and the film leaders that take the viewer up and down the painting. Farber got rid of the object in the center, and the perspective is almost vertiginously multiple—the overhead view of the bowls of lemons, for instance, is distorted by the upward push of the various potted flowers. The flow along the film leaders and up the stalks is checked by other forms of verticality—the donuts, for example, or subtly raised objects, such as the dead bird on what looks like a book, or the plant on a rectangle of blue cardboard on the left. Movement also is checked by the intensive detailing of the lemons and the half-eaten bowl of oatmeal. The film leaders contain titles of films Farber was teaching at the time, such as Yasujiro Ozu’s 1962 *An Autumn Afternoon*, and there are scattered written notes, one a snatch of movie dialogue: “I want this room filled with flowers.”

Story of the Eye (1985) riffs on Georges Bataille’s notorious novel of the same title, and on the “I,” the first-person pronoun. The images of food here are autobiographical, Farber told me, as all the food came from his kitchen, and was prepared by his wife Patricia.⁹ Vegetables, perhaps scallions, and bits

⁹ Farber, interview by author.

of string replace film leader strips or railroad tracks and move the “eye” across the five color fields. Instead of the saturation of *Domestic Movies*, there is an elegance to the spacing, a leisurely but meticulous positioning of notebooks, for example, or the three plates. The book open to an erotic Indian painting provides one clue to *Story of the Eye*—nearly all the food images involve sex, many shaping visual puns on female genitalia. Farber again attends simultaneously to the flow and the detailing—every seed, for instance, of the melon at the far left.

Flow and detailing. Over and over Farber’s writing prizes the detail—“the real hero is the small detail,” he observes in “Underground Films,” and termite art radiates “walls of particularization,” “focusing only on a tiny present area,” and “buglike immersion in a small area without point or aim, and over all, concentration on nailing down one moment without glamorizing it.” Decorous, overwrought white elephant art, “tied to the realm of celebrity and affluence,” accents (as noted above) “the continuity, harmony, involved in constructing a masterpiece.” Yet Farber also will argue for the subservience of all parts to a flowing totality—“Everything in a good movie is of a piece,” he affirms in the “Introduction” to *Negative Space*. Other essays criticize directors and actors who indulge electric, illuminating “bits” instead of a “panoramic unfolding,” a “continuously developing, forming personality,” or “an inevitable train of events.” Farber’s paintings, no less than his film criticism, operate along a stress, maybe a contradiction, that sometimes honors a grace note over the concinnous whole, and at other times exalts organic form over the niceties of any incandescent moment.

Hacks (1975), from the “American Candy” series, is one of Farber’s earliest representational paintings, and my favorite of his oils on paper. Against overlapping gray-silver planes, Farber arrays networks of circles and lines. The circles: a lollipop at the bottom, a candy tin at the top left, the corks. The lines: various candy bars—Tootsie Rolls, Black Crows, and the wondrous Hacks. All these candies would have been familiar to Farber from the movie concession stands of his childhood, much as the ground colors cue the silver screen, and it’s tempting to stroke some of the associations. The childhood movie candy vies with icons of adult life—the chocolate cigar at the right, the corks by the Tootsie Rolls. There is the sense of “hack” as in cut or bludgeon—a number of candy items are chopped off by the frame, or already half-eaten. During 1975 Farber also was writing movie reviews for Francis Ford Coppola’s *City Magazine*, and he was roughly eighteen months away from his last article. Inevitably, given all the film hints, might the

notion of the “critical hack” surge as well from the wily web of resonance? Farber hardly can expect a viewer to complete more than a few of the circuits he has coiled into his paintings like springs inside a jack-in-the-box. But as in Beckett’s confounding of “Proustian” and “equation,” it’s the snarl of mechanism and memory that Farber is chasing here, the way the formal dynamics of multiperspective slide against the instinctive disclosures of a life. The Farber equation, as I said, is never simple.

Geof Huth

Title

LIT

98

Geof Huth

Anthony Robinson

Simple Seduction

There was a time ago, a wrong with lipsticks,
hair dryers, rubber gum, and sinecures—no man land!
On twisted Friday, back-to-back bad matches.
We made out for the coast, ended up with hicks,
The two of us, best little girls, best grand boys
untrammelled by the fancy stuff and fighting Jays
found in bodies so unlike our own. He hatched
a nefarious plot, a scheme like scum, a box of sand!

My heart was a rough little beast, your skin
a mile of turf and mew so nice to slip inside,
so nice to be a porch-sitter, smoker of your trance—
your rounded on back, your found piece of lost long,
the slow soundless fuck, the all-day ride.

Into night—the background music impenetrable
and still, like a great raincoat, an old turntable.
I turn you to dust, I turn you on your side.
You kelly-green belly and my tongue means romance.
Ballad of the beaten, your windchapped, your song.

LIT

99

Anthony Robinson

Battle Lines

We might have been lovers, were this 1993—
a good year for fire and acquittals,
a good year for Girl Scouts and Trefoils.

I might have taken the trolley across town
to meet you under neon, to introduce you
to my friends the yellow curb and the manna tree.

I could have brought along my extra mirror:
my hair short, military crease in my brow,
my pockets full of plastic figurines.

You would look as you do now, only
older. I would be the me in the lazy picture,
splayed out on the dirty couch.

We would learn to be poets together,
because we couldn't think of anything else
to do besides make love, and that fades too.

We write history books, you and I.
Mine are full of fanciful recreations, battles
and dioramas. Yours are just the facts.

When the wars broke out, we'd take different
sides. You were always more given
to skirmish. You'd send me notes across the lines.

When we reunite, bring your mañana blanket

and your promise anklet. I want to touch your ankles
with my Charlton Heston lasso.

If we both die in battle, we'll assume our usual
forms, me here, 2002, you across the Great
Chaos, our perfect bodies riddled with holes.

LIT

100

Anthony Robinson

LIT

101

Anthony Robinson

Nicholas Twemlow

Dear Consommé

Issue here, gossamer. Belief
that subway doors will open
if they close on you. Spendy.
They classed this place up.
Renamed the lounge, same
warped mirrors, same imported
bustle. Hi, consommé, how've
you been? I've got a little
hurt I'd like to share. My jeans
don't fit right. Zipper's broke.
Blue plunge of thought,
discothèque ambition. I'm whisking
mother out of wintergale
to let loose like virus
her claims over me. Her molt.
Shrub. She'll do major damage
gleeful & loose-toothed. Brittle
thought that I am, the stars comment
nothing on me. Evaluating
on star-husked night encasing
another, mother-drift sneezed
out the anonymous nose. Open,
tomorrow, earlier than I'd like,
me, policed, locked in, interrupted
without interruption, wind at my back,
spending the next day
locked in the chamber of a bong
sucked into mother's lungs
as she, spent, cast out,
walks off in high dudgeon.

Intracranial pinball. Tilt.

Face give back, take my hand—do you know such
Ecstasy, its blowback, kissing you, mistakenly,
All analgesic evening, eating mushrooms a hue,
A spritz, you can't conflate the shapes, unmerciful
Enterprise, we're awaiting our face, code look
We split, two voices/either ear, a conscience, a guilt
A tavern drunk through, rumbled through,
Tiny light lights your, what? How Balthus of you,
Commodore, spanking your vatic self silly in the commode
Good for one conversation, but you dare to repeat
Repeat, we bare us to you, we understand your conversion's
An I you won't dot, the lemming you are, people
Are staring, wobble on, cane and all,
Perfect the slurry sermon, Sunday's got a bead on you.

LIT

102

Nicholas Twemlow

LIT

103

Nicholas Twemlow

Jason Stumpf

We Say to One Another

The classroom globe spins on screws,
a fascination I call
plumb, call true magnetic north.

Time squeaks past the landmass I've
put my finger on. I chose
it as my homeroom, father

-land. The music of the spheres
recalls Radio Flyer,
left in the weather. Listen—

and the sun falls from the sky
and back again: a sister
turns to her brother searching

for a name.

•

*I'm not saying
that it did, I'm telling*

you it could, is what I tell
teacher. And what I mean is
happen but she is smiling

as a classmate talks about
the Washingtons—D.C. and

state—as if they are the same.

Geographical report.

Spherical music. I trace
my finger down the line where

blue meets tan in flatted fifths,
in starts-and-fits, where the world's
blind something-or-other edges

toward order: song that isn't
song, dreams that hide the dreamer
—Listen.

•

Theoretical,

at first, we build our houses
on this cardboard ball. It turns
by my small hand. It's turning

now.

•

Once, the paper map peeled
away. I glued it back with
Elmer's. Heretical at

first, Copernicus glued his
map to a ball and heaved it
toward the sun. The Church censored

him. Copernicus to his
wife: *Whole days leaning on the*

LIT

104

Jason Stumpf

LIT

105

Jason Stumpf

next. The next day spins. Today

*spins. What am I to bless much
less believe—*

•

Spin. Spinning. Stop.

I will go here someday.

I will build a house and fall in love.

I will plant a fruit tree.

I will eat honey and curse the bees when they sting me.

My best friend will live next door.

Jason Stumpf

The Voyage

There is a river?

A wooden ship that does not move.

And a boat on the river?

The river is a river of mud.

There are people on the boat?

Time had no hold on us.

You were a child?

There is him and there is me.

Do you remember what you did?

The planks creaked with the weight of us.

And his face?

And his voice, the same.

LIT

106

Jason Stumpf

LIT

107

Jason Stumpf

Laurel Snyder

From *Daphne & Jim: The Truth and Other Stories*

A choose-your-own-adventure biography-in-verse

Introduction

A bird's-eye view, Pomona College, 1968

I.

This is an arithmetic. Of inaccuracies.

This begins in California. We'll add to it later.

But first a preface. "This can't be true," says a critic,
an uncle, "Tuesday has to follow Monday. Always—"

And always the voice in my head says the same.

Or "You were too young to remember

about the cripple on the beach."

And "*That* was the year your sister was born."

Or "You were asleep when the cops came."

Or "You were medicated and in your room

and what you *do* know, someone told you."

Or maybe, "You can't be objective—

or outside, can you? Admit it. *This* can't be
true. Admit it—*this* will hurt." But I have pictures.

II.

This is an arithmetic. Of inaccuracies.

This begins in California. We'll add to it.

There's a young girl, call her Daphne.

And a young man, call him Jim.

Both are younger than that. Both are broke(n).

They look the other way. They maintain—

That they are scared is an understatement.

That they are new and unfolding is a fact—

She's unfolding faster, bigger. She wants.

To unfold herself for you, she'll take. Him—

Wants are what she puts on for the boys.

Jim wants to hold her hand, but won't. Her—

She can take everything. *He* can wait.

For a minute, they see each other. And it *feels* true.

To follow Daphne to the beach, turn to page 126

To follow Jim to the beach, turn to page 127

LIT

108

Laurel Snyder

LIT

109

Laurel Snyder

Daphne's thoughts on Jim: Pomona College, 1969

He's thin, bony, even. He's awkward, but dark Jewish. He's from the other side of the country. And there isn't enough wine in the world. Enough of this—he's thinner than me. Nobody can be thinner than me. I'm barely here at all.

If he were a thought, he wouldn't be mine. If he were here I'd tell him to leave. If he would stop looking at me, I'd miss him, but only only then.

It's so sunny. Not on him, but everywhere else it's sunny. He lurks. His hands are always cold and he has these *ideas* of things. Not *things*, and he hates money, not because he doesn't have some, but because he might. Oh, I don't know.

What would *you* do? Hmm. I'll do that, I think—
What would *you* say? I'm a wicked girl. I like the notes he leaves, that he leaves notes. But then that he leaves.

To transfer schools and follow Daphne to Portland, turn to page 130

For a bird's-eye view of life in the dorms, turn to page 128

Jim sees Daphne: Pomona College, 1969

She looks over her shoulder. And I'm there, waiting. Over her shoulder. She walks like water. I get thirsty. She walks *into* the water. They pull her out.

Her hair's so straight and long, but that's hair for you. And that's me, noticing hair from a distance. Thinking. I'm on the beach, warm, Pacific, but wearing dark boots, itching on a warm day. I'm overdressed, overwrought, overwhelmed by all that shining hair. I'll shake the sand off.

She knows I'm there, I can tell, but she shakes her hair anyway. There are things I could tell her if she'd listen or I'd speak. Some things are unlikely.

Some things last *because* they're impossible, like *this*, this beach, Pacific and full of this skinny girl. Someone will pull her out, but I'll remember it better, later, once they've forgot it ever. I'll remind her, once I've thought it through, unlaced my boots. Once she's dry.

To follow Jim home turn to page 129

For a bird's-eye view of life in the dorms, turn to page 128

A bird's-eye view of the freshman dormitories: Pomona College, 1969

I.

Jim's sitting in a tree, a real one. Daphne lives in a room of boys and records. *Feed your head.* Music swarms.

Smoke crawls the room at night, heavy, often.
There are books, of course, and blankets, candles.

Jim's room doesn't matter, much. It's small and plain.
And he won't stay long. Mostly, anyway, he's not there.

He's in the tree, outside her room, the music and smoke,
with a song of his own, a quiet one, some words.

Maybe he doesn't sing it, just hums to the tree.
And maybe Daphne sees him there, outside.

The window and the smoke and the music
are a door neither uses. They stare instead.

Jim peers in. Daphne looks out. A bird staring
at a beast who stares back. But they're too young.

They can't figure out who's in the zoo—
who paid admission. They don't know from a bird.

What a beast thinks of a bird is hunger.
What a beast looks like to a bird is a mystery.

But here are two creatures, puzzling over
the bars between, the window. They both think.

They are both bewildered and in love
with the moment and the sun and the smoke.

The girl loves the girl, wants to love the girl.
The boy loves the girl, wants not to love so.

II.

Simply, honestly—a boy sits in a tree, beyond
a window—a real one. There's a girl watching within.

She's waiting to see. They both want him
to be singing. They both wish he were singing.

To quit school, pack up and move East with Jim, turn to page 129
To follow Daphne, fall in love with David instead, turn to page 130

Jim moves home: Baltimore, 1970

The sun was too bright. Everyone was the color
of the sun, or the color of the bright. It didn't look like
a real place. Too much. The people were full of silly

music, or that woman—the one I thought was a girl.
So now *I'm instead*. Now I'm home where the water is like
water and not sun. Where the people are all the colors
people should be, where I'm a person and not a tree—
sitter, a person and not a silence, a dark smudge in the bright.

There are things! There are thoughts and things and I'm
in the middle of them. I'm the middle, where the things connect.
Where the thoughts rub the things and make the things happen.

I'm back where the ground is, where—when the Lord made
land and water—he parted the water from the land. East.
Where there's enough gray, so the colors matter. Where,
quietly, I can speak. Read. Watch and take careful notes.
It was so bright there. Too much light to see by.

For a bird's-eye view of the death of the sixties, turn to [not included]

To follow Jim to Norway on snowshoes, turn to [not included]

Daphne follows David instead: Reed College, 1971

So instead I went with Him, the other Him,
the real Him. I followed Him. He led,
and I was too thin to argue. His tan back
was broad. He had all the words in His
pocket. He had everything—everything?

Yes! And so what if I was scared—He
Had to go, but when he went, He took
me, Me. Little me. I got to be his delicate, His.

You wanted Him too! You know you did.
Or you would've anyway, if you'd been around.
Where were you anyway? That was the place
To be, near Him. Until I woke up one day
And saw how pale I looked beside His tan back.

My hair felt dry, brittle. My hair was breaking.
Often, He was late. Often, he didn't care. Often,
I did and it was too much. Caring. So I left.

To follow Daphne back to Pomona and then East, turn to [not included]

For a bird's-eye view of the end of the era, turn to [not included]

Kathleen Ossip

Cinephrastics

Finding Nemo

The little one leapt from the pile
with wriggling force, gills quivering,
toward the white light, about to
burst with his vision... so much for
crypto-mythical shadowings!
If you see a dogfish, pet it.
If you see a foodflake, get it.
A bit of swish, a bit of pluck
floats you to the estuary
of the unbeatable gerund.

Chicago

On murder we can all agree,
agree the world's great religions.
She wore black velvet, a sweet-
heart neckline. A zit effloresced
with a loveme loveme subtext.
The dame, a striver, a danger.
Quoting a soccer dad: Come on,
come *on*, we're going for the college
scholarship. They must be against
life so to hate happiness.

The Godfather, Part III

Now that the mother-child bond is
slackened by multiple caregivers,
Freud is passing away like God
did. Good novels make moribund
movies. Middling novels make good
movies. No novels: bad movies.
The only dead novels: good movies.
Never make two when you can make three.
Might I but mourn tonight in thee!

Mulholland Drive

A popstar's a trunk in which vision's
buried. That shrill almost-beauty begs
exegetes. Certain songs, events, films
corrode, yet *never become gestures*
(Ashbery). In a thrust is such pleasure.
To die in her armpits, high octane!
But the song's peppy, not compelling.
Exiting the ER, the gale took
up my petticoats, or would have if.

Far from Heaven

takes place during the War of the
Flowers, darkskinned vs. lightskinned,
the petals like human faces,
flurrying. Now in the course of
the flurry, lucent petals change
to Bakelite, then to cruel iron.
"One battle too many," says she,
and the befuddled lay down arms,
thunderstruck in the colonnade.

LIT

116

Kathleen Ossip

LIT

117

Kathleen Ossip

The Man from Elysian Fields

WTF? This is someone's special vision, someone who thinks of himself as quirky. A lapse of impression: not art, not pop, a product that won't linger. With trying people (i.e., all of them), what often works is to state in blunt terms the starkest facts: "You're feeling bored and need to go home." Broad brows, brown brows, locker room by Armani. (Oh Jagger mine.)

Sylvia

Aurelia was anxiously cultured, the sort of woman who believes literature will save her socially, the kind of mother for whom a poem is worth club dues. Danner's portrayal of a snooty, haute bourgeoisie grande dame's impossibly false. Since character must always boil down to mother (and class), this film's *not* about Sylvia Plath. (But: the poet beside me, weeping.)

Mystic River

Seize now the story: then, tragic was kings. (The critics get off on what they see, cistern, cocked gun, a minor key.) Sell now the glory: *Woulda shooked, wouldna shaken.* In that quarter of duplexes,

the thrill of the stoop, snow lies like an oaf, an unwilling guy. To metaphorize snow, rather than guy. Reverse of the red red rose.

Michele Rosenthal

Secrets of a Samurai

The tragic myth is this: when you least expect it
You'll be called upon to cut your heart out,
Place it somewhere way beyond your reach, without
The body whose warmth the organ learns to covet.
When this is done, a vocal chorus will suggest that you commit
An act of self-repelling heresy: believe—beyond all doubt—
One frayed tassel of God's robe descends about
Just far enough to fully stuff and wholly fit
The aperture of your soul, which bleeds.
Today, you must choose one of two extraordinary deeds:
Accept God's gracious fingers dangling
A piece of cloth He doesn't mind you mangling,
Or shove your own hand into that small cavity,
Pull up the stronger man you've always meant to be.

•

Pulling up the stronger man you've always meant to be
You strain an unexpected muscle in your back.
In bed the next day with an attack
Of nerves, you think you can foresee
How this one act will freeze a curve in your identity
That leaves you maimed, gross as an old hunchback
Who shuffles down the street, some sad elegiac
Shell of familiarity that fades at dusk into a full transparency.

Well, isn't that your smooth Ego's joke and trip?
To make you doubt the worth of your own craftsmanship
He flips the order of the ground and the sky,

With a snap of slim fingers trains your eye
On all the fissures in the cracked concrete,
Which threaten to cripple any hint of self-conceit.

•

Threatening to cripple any hint of self-conceit
You drag yourself up from the rumpled bed,
Vow to continue *as you were*, instead
Of bodybuilding—after all, you're no athlete
Who seeks a new, recordable feat
Of form and discipline. No, it's said—
And you heard it—man needs one solid figurehead,
So you decide, belief in God should be complete—

Except, there exists this nagging, lonely, dark expanse
Of time: you gave God one, then another chance
To reveal Himself, or even, just fill up a room
That gagged and choked on its own doom.

But not a single presence came, and the rasping gasps abated,
Only because you held your breath, and so were liberated.

•

Because you held your breath and so were liberated
From all dependence, you chose the latter
Deed to guide your way. Now the matter
Staring you in the mirror you half-hated
When you hung it by a string: this weighted
Fact—it's an intangible thing you're after:
The smallest voice whose silken chatter
Flutters like an object excavated
From the dusty, cobwebbed caves of time,
An artifact so old and fragile, green with grime,
Pulling it through your lost-heart's hole

LIT

120

Michele Rosenthal

LIT

121

Michele Rosenthal

Might crush to dust what you trust to your head's control.

Stare down that glass upon the wall, and think,
I am a hero; heroes never sbrink.

•

I am a hero; heroes never sbrink—

You leave the bathroom sink at 8 A.M. reciting
This brand-new mantra, repeatedly inviting
The rhythm of the words to get in sync
With how your body moves, provide a link
Between your mind and spine. You're writing
I am a hero... 100 times, inciting
The curve to straighten out; it's on the brink.
You pause the chant to think, So *easy!*
That's when slick silence slams you like a fist.
You've kissed your last *I am* good-bye,
Now you're feeling a little queasy;
Thought your heart had not been missed—
But the beat, when you reminisce, begins to magnify.

•

The beat, when you reminisce, begins to magnify.
Its taunting music begs for you to give
Some focused thought to how you'll live
In such a stupor where instincts stultify.
In absentia, your heart can't hope to gratify
Even the slightest impulse to forgive
Sad history. Reclaiming your pulse will be imperative,
But you cut it out in a place you can't demystify.

Retrace your steps toward the sound of the pump?

The sky goes black, a cat screams, you jump

And spin, try to run in the opposite direction,
But your feet root, respond to the deep inflection
Of a voice that's calling from the concave hole—
You know that sound, that pitch, that tone: it is your soul.

•

You know that sound, that pitch, that tone: it is your soul.
The moment has come to follow through
On actions begun before you knew
The exact price for such a priceless goal.
Afraid, you doubt you're strong enough to behold
The bloody mess of such self-surgery. Then, strange déjà vu:
Your fingers itch with a wish: let them pursue
That imprisoned man who howls and hungers for parole.
You do. Up from your body's darkest crease,
He leaps to a precipice of bone and works to slip
Your heart back in its space. Piece by piece,
He explains how reinstallation will benefit
Your struggle to find, from tragic myth, release
—which, he winks, happens when you least expect it.

Kirsten Kaschock

Board's Response to Initial Query

Why a one-woman show? Tell us—is this performance art?
Can it be somehow about surgery?
How will the audience sit through two hours of her?
Can the stage support rain? Can there be a flood? Can she be both ante
and post-diluvian?
Can she contain that many animals?
Will it be too gestural? Totemic? Psychoanalytical?
Who will fund it?
How will you find a dancer with that type of stamina? Will you drug her?
Can it be somehow about surgery?
Have you considered Hiroshima?
Are you projecting? Does that make you feel enough like a man?
Is she barefoot? What about lifts? There won't be any—will that restrict
you?
Costume changes. None again—will that restrict you?
What restricts you? Is that what this is about?
Will the critics label it a dissertation? Will you be offended?
Can you be offended? Is that your intention?
Where is the movement coming from? Will it be pedestrian? Stylized?
Awkward?
When was the last time you had sex?
Who was that with?
We're not your mother, no. Do you wish we had been your mother?
Why do you think there are no maternal characters in your ballet?
Does our calling it a ballet offend you? Will you take up the term to prove
that it didn't?
Why no gods? Fathers? Why no lovers? Why only one woman?
Might she be schizophrenic?
Is she promiscuous? How would you show that, with no other dancers?

If she dry humps the stage, will that be seen as masturbation or possession?
Can she contain that many animals?
Is it about the bible in the end? We read it out of love. Why did you read
it?
Who is she anyway? Is she supposed to be Jesus?
Can she swim?
Whom are you refusing dry land? Why are you so angry?
You do realize you will alienate half your audience?
Will she wear a veil?
Why call yourself an abstract expressionist? Why not a Marxist? Why
modern dance?
This isn't about communicating, is it?
Can it be somehow about surgery?
Why, do you think, you haven't yet learned to bleed by yourself?

LIT

124

Kirsten Kaschock

LIT

125

Kirsten Kaschock

Marriage (3)

In the bent city
we tip over from too much standing.
You stand for father.
I attempt to stand in for the protagonist
who's gone into hiding.
We've wrapped our arms around the dead
like a rug to carry them to the dumpster.
We're that kind and the dead are up too many flights.
You jimmy the locks while I offer readings
and we make just enough
to pretend.
On weekdays the bills knock about
the insides of walls we don't own.
We don't pay
and the dead get louder.
Sometimes there are children across the street in a lot.
You throw bottles down at the asphalt
and talk about the colors.
Really, you want them to cut each other up—
so I won't want one.
That night, we ask each other whose turn it is in bed.
You say the hungrier one should cook
so I cook.
The dead make everything taste like caraway.
When I spit into the sink there is blood—and this
is the beginning of what you can't give.
You are much older than I am.
I am young enough to hate the dead.

Ernest Hilbert Nostalgia of Space

Believing in what was taken
Without gratitude or slightest grace in winter,
He was caught on metalwork
Wisecracking downtown.

She went off, abruptly religious,
To study flower arrangement
And captivity beneath no sun.
When she returned, hair flooded

With night on shoulders—
Yet blue and cloud beyond door—
She held a questionnaire equally wet
And filled with a new terror.

LIT

126

Kirsten Kaschock

LIT

127

Ernest Hilbert

Tony Tost

Bad Horse

A choking victim behind me considered his chicken bone in silence

To remember anything a man needs five other men, good ones : the man behind me was a good man & behind him : fine curtains nice to squeeze & semi-transparent

I tore them from their rod (if I do it I say it), wrapped them around my neck (it's my balloon so I get to pick the string) & (I get to pick the string) then I swallowed

The embalming fluid now dripped from my lips : my decision-making has traditionally been accompanied by ritualistic drinking

Sleeping with strangers is fun though deeply troubling (the first time I gave head to a donkey was while burning a flag at an American Legion Hall) & the eye of the soul, it seems, can be explained by quantum nonlocality

I'd explain this further (I'd like to) but I have a little excuse called "extreme dyslexia" & so what : I need a little work on my delts and lats as well but I'm fine, I'm cut

Behind the curtains a window looked out into the world inside a snow globe

I'm inside a snow globe as well : the snow globe of dyslexia

I must kill the dragon to escape but as they say : here I am, still on my father's desk

& behind my father's desk : another dragon, blinking his eyes in Morse code,

spelling out P-L-E-H

Who here does not need?

Who here rides his dragon through his father's house & out onto a street from a century ago?

Ceremony St. : & on it are ten houses the kids call "The Ten Commandments"

One of those kids is my grandfather's oldest brother, given the name the Marching Duck after his father breaks both his feet

So the Marching Duck carries seven bullets in him throughout his teens

Dies killing 200 Mexicans in one week in 1924, uses their fleeing horses as shields

Behind his grave there is a portal into the future

But before one can enter it one must make a video from beyond the grave : any grave

That is, as they say : any grave but one's own

We should remember the Marching Duck, his wives, our thieves, this endless singing, the Versaw Ghetto, the enormity of our task : TO REMEMBER

Behind your seats there are crash helmets to remind you of when Father drove the car into the TCBY, killing that poor little black boy

Inside the helmets are pictures of that boy

On the back of the pictures should be clear, precise instructions to where I am buried in someone's grave

That is, where I am buried alive with my treasure

LIT

128

Tony Tost

LIT

129

Tony Tost

Ah, & did I forget to mention the treasure?

When I was twelve I ran to California & met a man named Wayne Donald with whom I sailed around the world & invented toys & translated Catullus and *Don Juan*

& I, friends, truly hope that, by now, you are no longer in this room [*room empties, television remains on*]

& thus Wayne & I invented new ways of spelling things & sold these inventions in pubs or ports across the globe

E.g., for the equivalent of five American dollars a child in Spain is able to spell *bat* as *KFE(ii)*, or for twelve dollars one lucky Cambodian retiree now spells *baroque* as *braque*

I was a bad horse : Wayne was a clever donkey

& so we stayed a week with the granddaughter of Lev Sergeivitch Termen & just to amuse Wayne, I never touched her

&, friends, right about now [*at this point, Harvey, the man speaking on the screen, lifts an hourglass and looks at it*] you have passed the bronzed saddle & the broken snow globes & have possibly located the dozen shovels I placed around the Marching Duck's grave [*“one by one, we each shall do the shovel waltz”*] with myself sleeping inside it &

By now you are detaching me from my underground breathing apparatus [*Harvey is silent for a few seconds, takes a few drags from his cigarette*] & probably right about now I am rubbing the sand from my eyes & handing each of you directions to the treasure

& surely now I am kissing all of you & entering the portal & [*drag...drag*] perhaps now you are realizing that you cannot read the directions because you never bothered to learn this new method of spelling

But you do recognize the various nationalities—a *Pablo Mesa*, a *Yin Long*, a *Liliya Termen*, and so on—listed on the outside of the envelopes

& so maybe now the brightest among you have figured that these are the names of the people Wayne and I sold the spellings to

So : the yacht is still at New Vallejo pier : use it, I don't need it

For by now I must be walking through the cemetery, placing expensive flowers beneath what I think (I am extremely dyslexic) are your names

LIT

130

Tony Tost

LIT

131

Tony Tost

Daniel Borzutzky

Are Nudists Nuts?

After Elton R. Shaw, "Are Nudists Nuts," Sex: Sane Sex Standards, June 1935

King Saul was a nut. He stripped off his clothes and prophesied before Samuel. Jesus was probably a nut. Disciples were nuts. When they were fishing they were often nude. They saw nothing improper in disrobing because in some occupations nudity was common.

Isaiah was a nut. The Lord told Isaiah to be a nudist and he was one for three years. The Lord told Isaiah to loose the sackcloth off his loins and the shoes off his feet and Isaiah did so, going naked and barefoot. Thus by the prophet walking naked and barefoot, three years was the shameful captivity of Egypt and Ethiopia prefigured.

Early Christians were nuts. Historians of the early church tell us that in the outdoor ceremonies the rite of baptism was administered to candidates in the nude. Also, the nude bodies of early Christians were oiled during purification ceremonies. Many outstanding ministers of our day are nuts. The outstanding pioneer in German nudism was a Lutheran Minister. The nudists are not nuts. The nuts are the people who are slaves to the

superstitions of the obscenity of the human body. According to one nut, members of a tribe accustomed to nudity, when made to assume clothing for the first time, exhibit as much confusion as would a European compelled to strip in public. Another nut adds that nothing would make for avoidance of potbellies and other acquired deformities as nudity would.

What good are clothes? Clothing tends to make men bad. Judge B. Linsey wishes the day might come when we might strip every stitch from our bodies anywhere at anytime without shame.

The human body in action, as in a graceful dance, or in athletic exercise, brings additional elements of esthetic enjoyment to the spectator. Nudists are nuts. Let's take them to Africa and let them run around with baboons and monkeys. What is a nut? When you've bats in your belfry, if your comprenezvous rope is cut. If you've nobody home in the top of your dome. Then your head is not a head; it's a nut.

LIT

132

Daniel Borzutzky

LIT

133

Daniel Borzutzky

Richard Peabody

Princess Daddy

I am Princess Daddy complete with tiara and I'm en route to the Princess Planet with Twyla, my three-year-old whirlwind of a daughter. She has constructed a spaceship out of wooden blocks to transport us. She's wearing her purple tutu. "Where's your tutu, Daddy?" Good question. One my wife wishes to remedy at the very next thrift sale. My Redskins T-shirt does clash a little with my silver tiara. I wonder just how the guys in section 114 will relate to me if I show up at FedEx dressed like this. Hogette in training?

"No, no, no," Twyla says. I'm on the wrong side of the airlock, the wrong side of the wall of blocks. I scuttle across the rug. I sigh loudly. I had a tomboy in training for about two years but no longer. Soccer and uppy ball (basketball) looked like locks. Now Twyla is a girly-girl more interested in her hair ties than playing outdoors.

The first time I ever took Twyla into a bookstore she waddled to a display and brought me back a book on Glitter Nails. She was one! I knew I was doomed right then but lived in denial—the past three years a complete and total blur. Twyla hasn't actually done my nails yet, though she occasionally does my hair. I forgot once and met a postal worker at the door with pigtails and shiny plastic clips in my hair. Hope he has daughters. And it occurs to me for the first time that if he has sons he won't get it at all. Having daughters has changed me fer sure. I want Twyla to be happy so I cut her a bit of slack. I also want her to let me answer my e-mail in peace without commanding me to be her slave.

Twyla assures me that once we land on the Princess Planet we will find lots and lots of Barbies. So that's where they come from? Every time I walk that pink aisle at Toys R Us I have indeed left the cosmos. Watch a covey of three-year-old girls approach that aisle and learn what reverence is all about.

"Where my mer mer aid?" Ariel is naked under a black washcloth on the bottom of the tub upstairs. I know this because we left her sleeping underwater last night. Twyla's fingers are too tiny to manipulate the Disney cloth-

ing so it falls to me to dress the miniature doll for space travel.

Luckily three-year-olds are still sometimes distracted, tricked, or manipulated by tired daddies who just want their kids to nap. Cuz nothing looks better right now this second than an afternoon nap. Not vodka, coffee, or the promise of a hot night in Vegas.

Twyla is wearing her silver and purple mules. She's clopping them all over the hardwood floors like Shirley Temple with a bad case of Scarlett O'Hara fever. No boys are allowed on the Princess Planet. "I'm a boy," I tell her. "No, you a Princess Daddy." And Twyla explains: "Mommies, babies and sisters are peoples. Boys, mens, and brothers not peoples." "But daddies are boys," I explain. "No they not," Twyla laughs. "Daddies mans, no people."

I'm so confused my head is rotating. And then I get it—the trick to space travel for males is to be a Princess Daddy. A Princess Daddy is people. "What are you?" I ask. Twyla laughs. "My a girl, my a people."

I try to imagine my real-man father visiting the Princess Planet. Impossible. I try to imagine one of my buddies visiting the Princess Planet with his daughters. Still doubtful, but more doable somehow. Would Laura Ingalls Wilder's dad have made this trip?

C'mon naptime.

I am Princess Daddy en route to the Princess Planet and I don't care who knows it. Eat your heart out Captain Kirk.

LIT

134

Richard Peabody

LIT

135

Richard Peabody

John Randolph Carter

God, Here I Go Again
Bottoms Up!

Thrill-seekers gather to say their
last goodbyes to fear and regret.
They're about to take the great leap.
Leap of faith, leap year, leaping lizards!
They're about to fly the coop, down the chute,
realize their wildest dreams.
They're about to meet Marilyn Monroe in Heaven!
There she stands for eternity above the
subway ventilation shaft with her white
dress blown up around her waist.

LIT

136

John Randolph Carter

Jason Schneiderman

Wester

We're leaving the subway and Karen says
"We're going to 10th Avenue," and I say,
"So we'll be going wester?" and Karen says,
being all mean about it, "No, we're not
going 'wester' because 'wester' isn't a word"
and I say "Well it should be" and Bill says
"'Wester' isn't a word because there's no
'westest'. Like if I were in China and you
were here, we'd both be west of each other,
and besides, west only exists on earth, like
astronauts are never west of the earth or
east of each other." and I say, "Yeah, but
when we get where we're going, we'll be
more west than we are now," and Karen says,
"Yeah," and Bill says "Yeah," and I say
"Wester."

LIT

137

Jason Schneiderman

This Is My Body You Eat

When we opened the door to his trailer, Arnold was giving oral sex to a woman. He looked up and, with that accent, said very slowly, “Eating is not cheating.” —Premiere Magazine

It was her body he ate, and he remembered her
in the taste on his tongue, in the smell of his breath,

and she remembered him in the part of her
that she'd given to him, in the fluids that she did not miss

per se, but that she knew were with him,
hiding in the secret places of his mouth,

the way a grain of sand can work its way out
to the tip of your tongue,

and you haven't been to the beach in months.

Tammara Lindsay

Dear TJ Maxx

We are both the same kind of crazy,
offering ourselves for less than the going rate.
I'm in love with your double price tag,
your sacrificial sexy. I'll only cheat
if I find that Nine West purse cheaper
elsewhere. Don't tell Tommy I got those panties
for five bucks—and I'll keep the dirt I smoothed
away from between the snug aisles
of that handbag zipped for life. These secrets
make me a more efficient lover,
the suede and faux fur coat I pamper
myself in. There is something false
shimmying around your yummy,
but I'll still kiss it. I'll twirl through your row
of sweaters, too, a naked nostalgia, rubbing
cashmere on my cheek. On Saturday
afternoons, after payday, I vow to be submissive.
Let the leather purses embrace me; tie me up
in all your lovely. I will bow down to the leather
boots and lap up the odor blooming there.
I will use my hands to coddle and sniff
your lotions and bath oils too. I will stick the tip
of my finger into more potions than I can remember.
But let them remember me, my sticky impression.
And I will try on everything that fits.
I will shake your coffee beans and convulse
with the rattle. I will lick the cookbooks, too,
and leak onto their glossy goodness.

I will eye what I cannot have and surrender
my red, patent leather Gucci wallet at the counter.
I will catch myself dummying in the *VISA* emblem
and still feel comforted by my shameless gaga.

LIT

140

Tammara Lindsay

Mike Topp

Three Poems

Wyoming

The Tibetan monks came to town last week. I went to see them chant and dance and lay out their mandala. The monks were very dedicated; I walked up and patted one on the shoulder, secretly affixing a sign that read “Kick Me” to his back. I think spirituality should be fun.

Castle

When my father first heard I bought a castle, his eyes got wide, his coffee cup came down. I said to him, Look Dad, don’t get upset—it’s not real flashy like the kind you usually see advertised on TV. But Dad didn’t adjust to it at all, frankly. He’s really old-fashioned.

Preparing for a Blackout

Cut wires.

LIT

141

Mike Topp

Joanna Fuhrman

Moraine for Bob

You were never a man
in the television sense of the word.

I was never a wild Slinky
in the sex-club sense of a toy.

You were never a tobacco store
in the Modernist sense of a trope.

I was never a snowdrop
in the candy store sense of a treat.

You were never day glow
in the fashionista sense of a scarf.

I was never *withyouallthetime*
in the username sense of a self.

You were never a strumpet
in the toothache sense of an insult.

I was never a tooting horn
in the childhood sense of a game.

You were never a hole-in-my-heart
in the country singer sense of a vista.

I was never a paper doll
in the pyromaniac sense of a pal.

You were never a parenthesis
in the phony secret sense of a sign.

I was never red lipstick
in the pulp novel sense of a threat.

You were never a word
in the mystic sense of an obstacle.

I was never a shaking castanet
in the midnight sense of a song.

LIT

142

Joanna Fuhrman

LIT

143

Joanna Fuhrman

Jack Kimball

For Charles Bernstein

While this is a totally accessible love poem, some metadata are available. And though there is nothing in these data that is difficult to value, note the area marked "mountaineering" deploys the words that were originally computed using an interpolated resolution Interrupted Goode Homolosine simplicity and, more, there are no new, shiny, cheerful concepts to get run over by, secondly, no death of art behind the scenes theories that may have been treated as if they were parts of an original datum to confuse you. This dataset, of course, has no intellectual pretensions, yet women continue listening to both sides of data. Love under these conditions is purely an expression in which the writer (I was going to write wirer) broke his ankle getting to it—if he did break his ankle (and if the writer is male and not footless)—along with the mixed feelings of the author who could be some distinctly other entity than the writer (or wirer) based on a near-permanent icecap. These then are my instrument and set approach—the "my" referring to me, the person showing you how to turn the instrument and set a course to you now. If I take another step (there is a gap in the data here).

Differences associated with biological sex should not be construed as genetic differences. Love is all about communication. Altitude to altitude. A love dataset appreciates and values you as the parcel of the mountain it celebrates the triumph of, the human mist descending amidst the usual pitfalls and calamities—not that there are pitfalls today, our noting the routes we could take, the date, the weather, they can be avoided or otherwise subsumed into these data which have so few lines, and so few words, and fewer syllables than the downfall circuit has forks in its path to count now. Each line (you could say every word) and all syllables perform as in one spin of the 'compass' between the two (of X), both a physical point and a point in time when the two evolve into one, and when you think about it, it was right somehow, and symbolic, you could say. Technically, I agree, oh yes! Historically, no! there

is no good because I'm with you, my love. And consummation (of X) is a no. Below a hundred thousand feet or more from here, readers would each lose their way in a pathless scrubland reading the data in an identical manner and derive the same message (sorry, there's another gap).

This set, like all good waymarks, tells a story but what does that mean? While at times recording bitterness, anger, resentment, xenophobia, and hints of racism, the ultimate report is affirmative. It finds self-mastery even in those spiteful moments—was it something to do with me? I don't think so, you see, men focus on only one side and block out the other, even though, apparently, it's instinctive to attempt to listen to both. Do you feel like leading a life that the other shares with you? This question represents the hope for a surrogate that doesn't turn its back on what a paraglider would feel like, that doesn't think it's better than the one who screams back, "no, it was something to do with me!" that is committed in other words to a foundation in pop culture, like hedge climbing and fly opening. "I have no dogma!" Fair enough but it follows there's no point, and there's absolutely nothing fashionable in not being yourself. So it says I may as well switch back to just what it says. It's love.

LIT

144

Jack Kimball

LIT

145

Jack Kimball

Unhappy Teen Blond

Pardon me but I would like a word with you.
Food tastes better & I notice flowers. What's
wrong with me? Now may I introduce myself?
What are you reading these days? I love food &
haven't had any for a while. Crunchy leaves under-
foot and wearing your 2(x)1st's, walking through
the park I really meant I want to apologize for
drooling on you. Don't be fooled thinking poetry
has to be heavy. It was something I ate. If the
day comes, this should be read aloud to our girls,
Harold, Joe, Jr., & Francis, Blue Moon, Valazquez,
Angela, some people like poetry. Drink to me
Bouguereau. You seem nice.

LIT

146

Jack Kimball

LIT

147

Maureen Thorson

Maureen Thorson

Too Late Now

Overly flashy, that's what a mermaid declaiming poetry is.
She hangs out during morning's cardamom hours,
Snapping pods. She looks like a Berliner.
She's got a black heart and a good dress.

In her eyes there's something either ancient or too young,
A yellow fleck or so.
Her eyes are a visual form of Tourette's;
They keep speaking indecently to me.

O, God of my wishes, God of all power,
Can't you listen to this one wish of mine
And get rid of this mermaid? That's all I want:
Not to listen to her dress, see her words,

Or stop to talk to her when I should be working.
That little black dress is a torment,
Those eyes trip me up like a burnt-out light
Crowned with rays of color.

Even at home, there she is, waiting for me.
I can't escape her white skin.
I can't believe you'd let me marry a mermaid!
Now every day, all I do is drown.

Geof Huth

Title

LIT

148

Maureen Thorson

LIT

149

Geof Huth

Felicia Swanson

Sugar Water

“It’s Halloween for adults,” my friend Louise tells me over the phone. She’s been on call so much that this is the first time I’ve spoken to her voice-to-voice in over a month. She sounds wired from exhaustion. “It’s exactly what I need, Nora. Death and rebirth. Something to flush out my spirit.”

It’s cold and rainy, and I don’t want to go to some outdoor festival, or to the party her friend Camille is having. I’d rather stay inside and hide from trick-or-treaters. Louise senses this because I’m not saying anything. “It’s going to be fun,” she tells me, with the same voice she uses for her patients when she’s telling them to quit smoking or stop eating cheese or whatever else she tells them for their own good. “It’s a chance to go out and see people.”

“I don’t feel like seeing people.”

“Well, I do. It’s my first night off since September. I want to go out.”

Louise is in her third year of an E.R. residency at Rush Memorial. She spends every day—and every third night—at the hospital. Since I miss her, and only because I miss her, I agree to go.

Not only does she convince me to go, she talks me into driving. She slides into the passenger seat looking the same—compact, strong, determined. Immediately I feel at ease, the way I always feel with her. She’s the friend you want to have with you in a car wreck, an avalanche—she knows what to do when the shit comes down. She rants about the hospital while we head south on Western Avenue. “But I have to be a doctor—I need the salary. The cost of becoming one has trapped me into it.”

“We’re all trapped by something,” I tell her.

Atop the hill at Belmont, the downtown skyline appears on the southeast horizon, shrouded in lifting clouds of pollution and rain, the spires of the Sears Tower and the top of the Hancock lit up in orange.

“What about you?” she asks. “What are you trapped by?”

Of course she would ask this, but I’m not in the mood for soul-baring tonight. “Kids who don’t look where they’re going,” I say, as we turn west onto Logan Boulevard and head into the festival traffic clustered around Logan Square. Camille lives on the same boulevard that hosts the festival,

and it’s barricaded off, no parking anywhere. People fill the streets, outnumbering cars and traffic cops. I cut in and out of lanes, picking side streets at random. By the time we find a spot to park on one of the many tree-lined streets anchored with row houses, we’re almost a mile away from the party. This night can’t possibly be worth the effort.

Twenty minutes later, we ascend the wide, thick, century-old stone steps to the front porch. I think of whose footsteps I’m walking on. Chicago socialites in Edwardian attire. A postwar mother with her children. “They only rent the first floor,” Louise says and rings the bell. “I think her landlord lives upstairs.”

Louise’s friend (I always think of her as Louise’s friend, though I’ve known her just as long) greets us within moments. Camille is short and plump and blonde. She would be condescending if she weren’t so naïve and sweet, but instead she’s just annoying. “It’s so good to see you guys!” she gushes in her pixie voice, hugging each of us in turn. Her arms feel like a greedy child’s around my neck. She takes our coats and propels us on the obligatory tour. Murmurs of the party lurk in the hall, but the candlelit rooms crowded with low couches and full bookshelves are devoid of people. Louise oohs and aahs, while I trail behind, barely listening. Camille never figures out that I’m uninterested, so I never feel the need to feign interest while I’m with her. “Everyone’s back in the kitchen, of course,” she calls over her shoulder, heading down the long hall. “No one wants to go very far from the bar. Come on, I want to show you to My Joe.”

The brightly lit kitchen takes up the entire back of the apartment, with counters at one end and a full dining table under skylights at the other. There are about a dozen people planted around the perimeter. Camille doesn’t introduce us. She takes us to the counter where the bar is set up and shows us My Joe. My Joe is tall and lanky, with dark hair and very long arms. He wears glasses and has a firm handshake, and he pours two generous glasses of red wine and hands them to us. “It’s a mixture of Merlot and cabernet sauvignon,” Camille assures us. “Australian wines are the best.”

For My Joe’s sake, I listen and chuckle at appropriate pauses while he and Camille tell us about their move and bemoan their mismatched furniture. “The perils of living alone too long,” Camille says, and we all laugh, but I know if she were a better friend, or if I had bigger balls, I’d call her out on the fact that she’s openly admitting to latching on to someone because she thinks she’s running out of time.

Are we running out of time? I always wonder, especially at times like

LIT

150

Felicia Swanson

LIT

151

Felicia Swanson

these, when someone else hooks up. I'm twenty-nine and single. I have no love interests on the burner. And it doesn't bother me. Should it? Should I be wanting something I don't have? What I do have—solitude, independence, focus—suits me just fine. Would my life really be so much better with a man to complete me? Would I be worth something more if I were a better half of something bigger than myself? Would I sleep with more peace of mind?

Camille's sister Connie and Connie's boyfriend join our cluster. Harold is with them, too—Harold, who immediately takes Louise by the elbow in a way that's too sisterly to be lecherous. His lips linger on her cheek. "It's good to see you," he tells her.

I'm convinced Harold is a big, burly, blond-haired gay man. Louise tells me he's just effeminate, but very straight. Then why don't you go out with him? I ask. He's not my type. Then why do you lead him on? I don't, she says, though she still gives him the look of absolute rapture, the same look she's giving him right now as he's lamenting the three-percent real estate tax increase in Bucktown.

I love Louise. She's always caught between so many parts of herself. She's the first one to admit it—none of this posturing to pretend she's got it together, even if she is a doctor. Being with her makes me feel less schizophrenic. Is that a bad thing to want from a friendship? Validation, kinship, justification for one's own insanity?

I gaze around the room, my face composed with nonattachment, the way I've learned it's acceptable to look at a party when there's no one you know, or no one you particularly want to know, which is how I feel tonight. No music plays at all—it's all cocktail conversation. Conversation I've heard before, and conversation I'll hear again, with these same people or ones just like them, always at parties and never in between. I'm getting too old for this. Some of the people I recognize from previous Camille parties: a pharmacist, a trader at the Merc, the state comptroller's wife. The others must be My Joe's friends. Across the room under the skylights, a trio (two men and a very young-looking woman) stands beside the table laden with picked-over trays of too much food. The trio is European-thin and eats nothing. At these parties there's always someone who doesn't speak much English, studying at an American university, accompanied by someone who doesn't speak English at all. I envy these guests; they have a reason to stay removed.

Camille lets up a whoop. "OH, HI!" Everyone turns toward the door, where an Indian woman stands, wearing a flannel shirt and blue jeans, hold-

ing a baby in a puffy pumpkin costume close to her chest. Camille introduces her to everyone as Neha, her landlord who lives upstairs, and Neha's new daughter Katie. People nod politely and go back to their chatter. Our conversation circle regroups around them. I have little more curiosity about baby pumpkins than I do about interest rates. But Camille is ecstatic. "She's so adorable! Look at her little green hat!" She takes Katie—whose skin color is closer to hers than Neha's—and from the way she handles her, it's obvious she wants one of her own. I wonder if My Joe sees this, too. If he does, his face remains politely oblivious.

The women in our circle coo over the baby, while the men (I count myself among them) sip our drinks. Suddenly, the young, urban gentility of the party is ruptured by abrupt, raucous laughter. Once again, everyone in the room turns, this time to the corner under the skylights. Next to the European trio appears an older man, maybe seventy, loosely drunk, slapping his thigh, trying to engage the European trio in conversation. They stare at him confused, perhaps a little repulsed.

"Dad," Neha calls to the white-haired, white-skinned man. "What are you doing down here?"

"Checking out the party!" He weaves toward us. "This place is full of young people!"

I haven't been called a young person in a long time, and it provokes the standard adolescent reaction—who's this dad and why is he crashing our party?—which I find very enticing at the age of twenty-nine.

"This is my father-in-law, Gerald," Neha says. She is unembarrassed, probably because he's not blood.

Our host offers him a drink. Gerald's watery blue eyes light up. "You kids got some scotch?" My Joe heads toward the bar and Gerald follows. Camille leans closer to her landlord. "It's no problem. He's more than welcome. He can stay as long as he likes."

"Not too long," Neha tells her. She retrieves her pumpkin from Camille's tight grip and calls after Gerald not to linger. He raises his glass to her. Once they're gone, the conversation circles shift again. Camille and My Joe attend other guests. The European trio absorbs Connie and her boyfriend. Harold and Louise resume flirting. The young-uns avoid getting stuck talking to the dad—except me. I'm not feeling all that young, and I need a date for this party.

"Hello," I say to him.

He swigs the scotch and takes me in, his face revealing delight at being

stuck with a much younger woman. “And what’s your name?”

I’ve spent my whole life around happy drunks—my dad, his brothers—and instantly I am myself again. “Nora.”

“Nor-a. Nora Nora Nora.” He shakes his head. Standing beside him, I can tell Gerald was once a tall man, though he has shrunk to my height. “I knew a girl named Nora. Took her to the prom. She went home with somebody else.” I’m about to tell him I’d never leave him at the party, but he reaches for my glass. “Looks like you need a refill.”

I shield it from him. “I can’t. I’m driving.”

“You’re not going anywhere for a while. This party’s just getting started.” I relinquish the only safety net I’ve been given at this party and watch with amusement as he uncorks the bottle of red and empties it, sloshing purple tributaries over the rim. He leans on the counter to steady himself and hands me the glass. “It’s only sugar water.” He blinks his eyes. A misfired wink.

“Sugar water is for children.” I’m flirting with him now.

“You’re not telling me you’re underage, are you? My wife will kill me.”

“We don’t have to tell your wife a thing.”

His eyes wander the room behind me, enamored with the liveliness. “I sure never expected to be at a party like this tonight.” Dry riverbeds of wrinkles line his face, originating at the corners of his mouth and eyes. Maybe he’s older than seventy, and looks younger because he’s drunk. Or maybe he’s younger, and looks older because he’s a drinker. I don’t care if he’s a drinker or not. I only know him for this night, and he’s drunk tonight, so why not indulge his happiness? It’s a hell of a lot more interesting than real estate and political party cocktail gossip.

I lean closer to him, inhale his Old Spice. “I hate these parties.” I whisper.

He looks at me, his face inches from mine. “They get a whole lot worse.” His words are suddenly sharp, the irises inside his watery blue eyes focused. I wonder if he’s been playing the part this whole time. Then he blinks, his eyes soften, he’s drunk again. “At least there’s better-looking people here.” I can’t help myself. “You’re not so bad-looking yourself.”

“Oh? You must be as drunk as I am.”

I laugh loudly, genuinely. His eyes open wide in surprise and he starts laughing, too. “My god, you’re a beautiful woman,” he says.

“Should I take that as a compliment? Didn’t you just tell me you’re drunk?”

“I know a beautiful woman when I see one,” he says, suddenly focused

again, leaning in towards me. For a second I see him as he once was, I see in his face the young man he used to be. And in that moment, this dance we’re doing turns into something more than gratitude for someone to talk to at a lame party. In that moment, I begin to consider how I could have made his life better. How I could have made him happier.

A woman appears in the doorway—older than most guests at the party, heavier, wearing overalls and a stained shirt. In her face are the beginnings of the same deep rivers that line Gerald’s. A tired mother of small children, come to collect the oldest child. Her eyes roam the kitchen and settle on my coconspirator.

“Dad,” she says, “what are you doing?”

“Meeting the downstairs tenants,” he says, jubilant. “This here’s Nora. Nor-a.” He raises his glass to me, but her eyes don’t waver from him. Her frame sinks under the burden of getting her father back upstairs. She takes a breath and stands up taller. “Dad, dinner’s ready. Time to come up.”

He waves her off. “I’ll be there in a minute.”

“Everyone’s ready to eat. It’s not fair of you to keep them waiting.”

The chipper hostess is at our side now, interrupting family bickering that feels less like a seedling than a continuation. With obligatory politeness, Gerald’s daughter refuses Camille’s offer of a drink and tells her dad, “I’m not coming down here for you again. If you’re not up in five minutes, we’re starting without you. Dinner shouldn’t have to wait on you.”

“Start without me, then. No one’s keeping you.”

Biting her tongue, she turns and leaves the kitchen. I watch her march down the hallway and disappear around the balustrade in the front hall. I know what kind of party she is going up to. Three generations swarmed around a tight dining table, cooking, eating, conversing, cleaning, and all of it an effort. I turn back to Gerald, quickly swallowing down his scotch so he can pour a new one. He’s right—the parties do get worse. Though the booze flows freer down here and it’ll make the rest of the evening easier to bear. Our host comes over and tells us we’ve got to get going. Only an hour left, he tells us. The festival closes at eleven. 10:00 already? we ask. Has this kitchen sucked up two hours of our evening? Gerald slaps him on the back and thanks him for the hospitality. I excuse myself to the bathroom, grab Gerald’s arm and tell him not to go anywhere before I get back. I’m a little drunk by this time. In the bathroom, I lock the door and splash my face with cold water. My reflection in the mirror is red-eyed and smiley. I look drunk.

I also look whorish, like a fired-up sorority girl at a frat party, like a barfly at a naval base. I have the look of a woman who knows she can get laid tonight just by snapping her fingers. This look is so apparent to me, yet so unfamiliar. It has been years since I felt this way. The rush is as good as it was in high school.

“Am I seriously considering this?” I look myself in the eye and ask aloud. I start laughing, which I guess means I am. I decide when I go back to the kitchen, if Gerald is still there, I will tell him to forget all about his family and demand that he go to this lame festival with us because I need a fun date. I have no doubt I can talk him into anything I like.

But when I rejoin the party, Gerald is gone. I sigh and look around at everyone, still standing in the kitchen, trying to gather momentum to leave. Camille yaps at our heels and finally announces loudly that she’s going to get all the coats. Her sister and Louise start clearing away the food and dishes. I stand off to the side, absently nodding at the small talk Harold attempts with me.

Within moments, a terrified scream comes from the front hallway. The kitchen halts in tense silence. My Joe rushes out, followed by Louise and the rest of the party. I linger at the back. It is Halloween, after all; who knows for what trick Camille would scream. By the time I meander up to the front hall, it’s a mass of hushed, worried voices, everyone huddled like onlookers at an accident site. Then they start to turn away. Harold and Connie, the controller’s wife—they all look embarrassed and worried. The Europeans linger before peeling back, leaving My Joe, and Camille, and Louise, kneeling on the floor at the foot of the stairs.

Between them lies Gerald, his head on the bottom step, legs sprawled out, eyes closed. How long has he been lying there? How many things happened since he left to go upstairs? Why didn’t anyone hear him fall?

Louise has her ear to his mouth, listening for breath. She sits up and feels for the pulse in his neck. “Gerald, Gerald, can you hear me? Open your eyes, Gerald.” Her voice is the same tone she used to convince me to come out tonight. “Come on, Gerald, open your eyes.” He does, at last. Camille bursts into tears. I just stand there and stare, I can’t pull myself away. Louise helps him sit up, slowly, talking the whole time. His face looks like an actor’s who has slept in his make-up. There’s a patch of red nestled in the back of his white hair that Louise examines. He mumbles something. “What did you say?” she asks.

His voice is slow and painful. He looks up at me. “Everybody gets old,”

he says spitefully, as if it’s my fault. As if I’m the one responsible that most of his life is over. It’s not just me, it’s all of us, all of us at the party he came down to, came to for the very reason that we are young. I have no choice in my age; someday I will be as old as he, if I should be so lucky. And how can Gerald say this to me? I am the one guest at the party not treating him as old. He’s looking at me and not looking at me; his eyes have the focus of a drunk who has suddenly sobered up.

Louise says, “Gerald, do you think you can stand now? We need to get you back upstairs to your family.”

He doesn’t resist as she and My Joe squat beside on either side and hoist him up. He’s weak but trying to walk, and they help him up one step at a time. I turn away; I don’t want to watch. Everyone is a little spooked, in a distant, temporary way. It’s not like they’re ever going to see him again.

Camille stands nervously at the foot of the stairs. “Why did you offer him a drink?” she demands of My Joe as soon as he and Louise reappear.

“He made a bee-line for the bar. I was being polite.”

“What’s Neha going to think of us?”

“Honey, I don’t think this is the first time something like this has happened.”

Quickly, we file outside, down the wide stone steps to the sidewalk. The rain has subsided, and it’s warmer, late autumn humid. I loop my arm through Louise’s. “Is he going to be okay?”

“I don’t know. He hit his head pretty hard, but he’s coherent.”

“What about later? Isn’t it bad to go to sleep after a head injury?”

“It can be.”

She shrugs sadly, and I’m not sure if her indifference is because she’s used to this sort of thing or because she’s covering up. I don’t have a chance to ask, because within minutes we’re sucked into the mob of young urban hipsters like ourselves moving in tight huddles. We’re the late crowd, apparently, arriving fashionably late all at once. We weave in and out of young couples, silly costumed college students, kids wearing garbage bags to protect their costumes from the rain, gay men with purebred dogs, some on leashes, some in baby backpacks, most with costumed ears and hats. I follow Louise through the entrance tunnel—a long pergola with twigs sticking out all over—and emerge at the other side to men on stilts who reach down to distribute pamphlets. Camille reads aloud to us, like she’s narrating the event. “This is a celebration of life, death, and rebirth through the four elements. The earth exhibit is first—follow me.”

We press our way into a large audience huddled around a circle with piles of dirt. Masked dancers haul dirt back and forth in cake pans, dumping each where another has just been refilled, showing the futility of it all. Then drums start, and they pick up neon-painted chairs and dance with them. The drums cease, the chairs are put down, the dumping and refilling resumes. We move on to the next exhibit. While the others watch costumed apes pour water into jars and beat them with sticks, I wander off. A perfunctory glance at the other exhibits—large fans attached to generators, wind chimes, shooting fire—and I head back to Camille’s apartment. Atop the front steps there’s a wide banister where I can squat for a while unnoticed, the breadth of the festival in front of me, the house behind. I intend to wait it out till Louise returns and we can go home.

I feel old and humorless, sitting atop the steps. I am twenty-nine now; I am an adult. I understand adult concerns, adult turmoil. I have no need for Halloween. I watch the crowd milling back and forth. It’s only a transitory holiday. A transitory holiday consumed with the concerns of youth. And a frivolous holiday, in light of an old man lying at the bottom of the stairs. I’m only philosophical because I’m alone and have a chance to pause, but I follow it through. It’s this moment—this moment we all face unless we never make it out of our youth—when we find ourselves alone, outside the party, lying at the foot of a staircase we do not have the strength to climb. It’s what we do in that moment—or don’t do—that decides our character. All the stuff leading up to it is just practice. Or diversion, however you want to look at it.

The front door opens, and Gerald’s daughter comes out. She doesn’t see me. “Hello,” I say, so I won’t startle her. She looks at me without recognition. I want to ask if her dad is okay, but it isn’t my business, and she doesn’t know me, and I don’t want to embarrass her. Though why should she feel ashamed? She hurries down the stairs and down the sidewalk, coat half-on, keys in hand. In a few minutes she comes around with a car, double-parks in front of the building, goes back inside. I wonder how she got the car through the barricades.

Within moments, the entourage appears. The daughter accompanies an older woman leaning on a cane. Gerald’s wife. She looks less agile than Gerald, but younger, maybe because she’s sober. Seeing her, I am hit with the pang of seeing the wife of your lover, the deep gnawing ache that you have so much to give that can’t be taken. Instantly I am berating myself; how can I even pretend to have any sort of connection to this man? I’ve only just met him. He won’t even remember me in the morning. If he makes it till morning.

Gerald comes out next, followed by a taller, younger version of himself, and Neha with the baby, the puffy pumpkin squashed, the little green hat discarded. I want to say something to him, but they don’t even know I’m there. They descend the steps, daughter and son bookending their mother the way Louise and My Joe did to get Gerald up the stairs. Gerald follows behind them, missing a step and nearly falling into his son. There is little commotion over this missed step, and in their apathy I can see that this is par for the path. But is no one concerned for him? He could have died, after all. Is this just a common occurrence, common enough for them to know he’s going to go home and sleep it off? Just one more thing that always happens at family parties, has happened before and is bound to happen again? He grasps the railing and takes one step down, stops to regain his balance. He sways. I envision him falling again, this time from the top of the stairs, collapsing on the cracked sidewalk. I count six steps, but it would be enough to crack his head for real this time. As soon as he takes another step, his foot stumbles and he staggers into his son, just below. His son props him up, takes his arm roughly and leads him down the remaining steps to the car, where his daughter is putting his wife into the driver’s seat. While Gerald climbs into the passenger side, daughter and son kiss their mother goodbye, and stand on the sidewalk while the car drives away.

None of them say anything as they head back into the house. Maliciously, I wonder what they will think if he doesn’t wake up in the morning. Maybe they will be relieved.

As soon as they are gone, I am left feeling stupid and insignificant. How absurd to spend half the evening talking to a drunk old man and presume to understand him. Presume to believe that I could have made him happier. So presumptuous, so self-righteous. What the hell was I thinking? By this time the festival has thinned considerably. I don’t know how long I’ve been sitting there. Louise crosses the street and waves at me. “I wondered where you went,” she calls.

“I couldn’t take the mob mentality anymore.”

“Yeah, I’m about done.”

“Had enough death and rebirth?” I ask. “Cleanse your spirit?”

“Used plenty of soap and water,” she says. As she climbs the steps to me, her eyes look up to the top floor.

“I saw them come out,” I say. “They helped him down the steps and put him in the car. His wife drove him home.”

She shakes her head. “You know, if he needed an ambulance, I would’ve

gone to the hospital with him. If he died, I would have been the one to call it. The first doctor on the scene is always the one to call it. I would have been drunk in a hospital, calling some guy who fell down the stairs because he was too drunk to climb up.” She shakes her head. “I can’t get away from it. It doesn’t matter where I am. I’m always a doctor.”

“It’s not so bad,” I tell her, “as far as traps go. At least you’re helping people.”

She shakes her head. “I’m just delaying the inevitable. I didn’t help that guy tonight. He’s just going to drink again until one day he can’t get up for real.”

“I wanted him to be my date,” I say.

“What?”

“I wanted him to come with us. I thought it would make him feel better to have some young woman on his arm. Like a pity date.” I hate the way that sounds. “But I meant it. It was genuine.”

Louise looks at me like she doesn’t know what to think.

“My trap—I think I know people five minutes after meeting them. I make all these snap judgments.”

“Yeah,” she agrees. “But a lot of times you’re right.”

“And a lot of times I’m not.”

The streets are less congested now; only a few groups of people linger, joined by people who don’t have anything to do with Halloween at all, people coming home from work, going to work, going to the grocery store for late-night shopping. We walk back to the car along wet streets that hum with the colors of reflected lights. There’s something so forlorn about wet, deserted pavement at night. Suddenly, I feel young again. A familiar feeling ripples through me. And I remember what Halloween is about. It’s not just about pretending to be something you’re not; it’s believing somebody else is what he or she wants to be. It’s going along with the mask. But at some point the mask gets too heavy, and the real person comes through.

It’s the same realization I make every year, accompanied by the same fleeting disappointment. And then it’s all over, so quickly, and it’s time to go home.

Jaime Corbacho

Hot Soccer Mom Action

“It goes without saying, Billy is a doll.” Saying this, I knew I was drunk. On Jack and Jim and apple juice. A drink I called the A-men. Apple juice—o, elixir of motherhood—I had to squeeze it from a box into my glass, burped forth its juicy juice contents, made us juicy with laughter.

Mrs. Weist was waxing Smirnoff on ices she drank from a wine glass through a sassy red straw. Mrs. Weist—*not Mary Kay*—because she was the type of person that needed to be owned. It had been a premium evening, drunk on the couch with a soccer mom.

What was to be her last bitty sip
she spilled,

“Jaime, I was watching the game and I—
these games and I—

eye that Nichols boy.”

Being AJ, the opponent boy, the forward for Fairview, her son’s arch nemesis (as it always occurs to fourteen-year-olds to have). I laughed at first, not gleaning the gravity of the confession, having secreted a crush on her own son, Billy, upstairs asleep beneath a poster of Anthony Kiedis.

His own dark

*“What I got
choo gotta give it to yo ma-ma”
coaxing a Kiedis*

in the making. Earlier at the game, I drank in his arms with their portent of lean muscle, the creativity untapped behind a brogue of blue eyes, the eternal worship that must be inspired by an introductory b.j. beneath the stands from a woman over a decade his senior. Weist not, want not, I thought.

But I was

without a son

allowed to maintain presumed perversities

taboo to domestic

add-ults. "Perhaps I'm sick.

Married so young. I had Billy when I was twenty." Her solemnity toured the house: the Hummel bric-a-brac, the mixed message of stain-resistant carpet, the curtains accenting wallpaper flattering sofa set in a very floral, very sentimental sort of way.

I pitied her like those on TV

who channel

the dead—her marital boredom

of sex (it's in, it's out,

where is it? who cares?)

forcing fantasies to an unreasonable Xanadu stung faint with obscenity like the copper smell of the freshly mown soccer field. "It goes without saying, this is between you and me." Drowsy woman, I covered her with an afghan and walked home in the middle of the street wanting Billy more than ever.

While somewhere in the neighboring district, AJ, exhausted by the win, had fallen asleep beside his trophy.

Google Search

I. Lost

You won 50 dollars in a geological

photography contest:

two rare boulders

lean against each

other's breastplates.

You wrote a play called *Fellow Travelers*.

Then later *Thoughts and Remembrance*.

Neither to any major acclaim—

off-off,

they would say,

those who didn't know you.

You were sick in the hospital.

The stick pills, the jazz—

what kind of lightning solos

remained to keep you alive?

And I wonder how the heart monitor

would sound its last

few bars to a trained ear,

a maestro.

You wrote a paper on the economic

cost of nonadoption

BT cotton in West Africa

(a special reference to Mali)

with (Misses or Mistresses?)

LIT

162

Jaime Anne Corbacho

LIT

163

Jaime Anne Corbacho

Liborio S. Cabanilla and
Tahirou Abdoulaye—if
those are their real names
their fates must be majestic.

You taught trumpet to a woman
named Green when you told me
your favorite color was black.
The making room for all color
in a wide romantic clef.
Sunday afternoons:
adagio then prestissimo then red.

If we are not careful,
we will wake up inside of other people
like space creatures using
bodies to find our way home.

II. Found

You are an attorney
working for Marc J. Grossman.
No one will guess it is morning
in Jersey—the flat spayed
dawn flails to sober itself
above amphetamine traffic.
You have a view of a busy street
and the palindrome of a woman
losing and replacing and losing
her hat in the wind that slaps like a nun.

You are drinking coffee at your desk
and living a smooth life
that will end like a movie
with a forced but satisfying kiss.

I've found you spilling coffee
all over your footnotes, that Christmas tie,
the Martinez case still fresh with insults.
You mop it up with your suitcase.
You mop it up with your steno pad.
You mop it up with anything you can get your hands on.

Please place your hands on me
like some warm spilt mess.

Marc Grossman will understand.
He is the forgiving type.

The Belt out from Where You Rested, Raymond Chandler

Please excuse, when I read you I got so tan—
the demimonde of the sun were we,
the employees of Singing Beach.

The gruesome twosome of ocean
and sand, I pictured your Candy, parched and
homo-absorbent beneath his siesta hat,
rubbing oil with his eyes on passersby.

A portrait of Madison to keep you honest.
Marlowe with an unlit cigarette motions
the gulls to scatter like pages of crime.
If I had a spaniel named Det. Marlowe
he would chase the gulls off the beach
into the shapes of waves.

And Missus Wade up to her calves
in that brilliant sweaty water that under
a rubbered sunset
is a metaphor for sex.

Or Lennox, two gimlets into another
man's wife has acquired some war scars
from sitting so long on the
vinyl Adirondack. Returns from the snack
shack as a Mexican.
“Honor does not move sidewise
like a crab, señor.”

Nor do clouds moist their kerchiefs
at *The Long Goodbye* to my employment.
My reading this summer is that
you, Raymond Chandler,
are the only jefe for my junta.

On a blanket near me
a man claimed his belt was stolen
while he slept. Sentimental to him
as the sand castles I built between chapters,
I offered him my dick novel to keep his
pants up.

That season, I learned death to
all writers that can't
hold their drink. I learned to write off missing
belts, to flip every
thirty minutes

and to die twice and move to Mexico.

LIT

166

Jaime Anne Corbacho

LIT

167

Jaime Anne Corbacho

Lara Glenum

Sock Monkey's Treatise on the New Typography

O Meat Light

O Vulture Light O Daughter

Detonated, I bleed sublexical characters & pink, cartoon rabbits

In the new typography

the sky will appear onstage in full war regalia

The horizon will be a thick caramel smear with bombs bubbling out

In the new typography

severed limbs will be pasted onto the landscape

& letters will be planted like landmines in each of the Valentine substrates

O Parasite

The brain is a white alligator-skin suitcase full of grenades & ivory horns

I take the steel pin out of my neck

My lungs are an air-raid siren

Off falls my plastic head

In the new typography, the mutated deer will escape your mouth

& the embryos lodged in its antlers

will fire on me with machine guns

I will at last appear in the sun

The skin of vowels hanging off me in long strips

This is as it should be in the new typography

O Daughter

All my meat will be revealed

& All massacred Heaven shall see it together

David Lehman

London Diary

Perdido

What am I here for?

For you if you're as sultry

as a sunset as magenta

as a haze or as indigo

as a mood with a mist of moon.

I'm beginning to see the light.

I. Q. Test

15 = 6. Explain.

The Course of a Particular

You may refuse if you choose

as the bubbles rise in the glass

of water beside the sleeper in the bed

whom I will not disturb because

he is destined to be the corpse

in the detective novel I am reading

by Rex Stout or John Dickson Carr.

London Diary

In the medieval gloom I wrote "Wives of the Proles."

LIT

168

Lara Glenum

LIT

169

David Lehman

Wives of the Proles

She caught her husband cheating with a loose woman on the web
and she beat him at his own game by posing as one such woman
and cybering with him to prove how promiscuous he was.

What's Your Opinion of the War?

It depends
on how it ends,
said the former Secretary of State.

Escapism

There was one big difference between God and the man they called the
Falcon. God forgives.

The Story of His Marriage

They were in a hotel room in October 1951. She had finished her highball.
The Giants had a man on base and one man out in the bottom of the ninth.
Ralph Branca was coming in to pitch to Bobby Thomson. She picked that
moment to announce she was leaving. He said, "I wouldn't leave just yet."
But she was already out the door.

London Diary

This is where people go when they have to eat alone.

Sadness

After reading his entire book—
and it's the same poem rewritten,
either the one about the crucifixion
or "Thanatopsis," take your pick—

The Mind Wanders

They went together like boy and girl, plug and socket, fork and knife, love
and death, until she opened her mouth.

Bar Parts / Bra Strap

He kissed her just to shut her up.

Universal Muff Diver

The pen is in the bushes.

Masturbation

Like hitting a home run in batting practice.

Language Poet

He wrote desire I read death.
It made more sense that way.

LIT

170

David Lehman

LIT

171

David Lehman

Midterm

Answer any twelve of the following questions:

(1) Robert Browning wrote: "O to be in England now that -----'s there."

- (a) Princess Di
- (b) April
- (c) the Puritan Revolution
- (d) Wimbledon
- (e) steak and kidney pie

(2) Name the character who disappears midway through *King Lear*:

- (a) the Fool
- (b) Hamlet
- (c) Castro
- (d) Auden
- (e) Goneril

(3) If actor Daniel Day Lewis's father had been British poet laureate, translator of Virgil, and author of pseudonymous mystery novels, his name would be C. ---- Lewis.

- (a) Night
- (b) Day
- (c) Cole Porter
- (d) Fred Astaire
- (e) Scorsese

(4) According to Chaucer, when do folks make pilgrimages to Canterbury?

- (a) Greek mythology
- (b) on their birthdays
- (c) April

(d) act III, scene 2

(e) opening night

(5) A ----- and his money are soon parted:

- (a) violinist
- (b) philosophy major
- (c) fool
- (d) banker
- (e) taxpayer

(6) The last words uttered by Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* are

- (a) Tomorrow is another day
- (b) Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn
- (c) We'll always have Paris
- (d) late model Honda, loaded, with air
- (e) Been there, done that

(7) If "average people remember imaginative love" were an acrostic, what would it spell out?

- (a) live and let live
- (b) today is the first day of the rest of your life
- (c) April
- (d) leave the gun take the cannoli
- (e) America produces romantically inclined lawyers

(8) Complete Alexander Pope's line: "-----s rush in, where angels fear to tread."

- (a) geek
- (b) Language poet
- (c) universal donor
- (d) fool
- (e) gave at the office

(9) What is the English word for the French "jour"?

- (a) pantywaist
- (b) day

- (c) bidet
- (d) Anglophile
- (e) soup

(10) Who stands on a hill and sees the sun going down while the eyes in his head see the world spinning round?

- (a) James Bond
- (b) the author of “The Waste Land”
- (c) the fool
- (d) Ashcroft
- (e) J. Lo.

(11) ----- me once, shame on you.

- (a) know in the biblical sense
- (b) know by heart Matthew Wilder’s hit song “Break My Stride”
- (c) win best supporting actress for a ten-minute role and then disappear
- (d) fool
- (e) all of the above except (c)

Extra Credit:

If the ----- would persist in his folly, he would become wise.

- (a) Blake scholar
- (b) fool
- (c) fake
- (d) 42nd president of the United States
- (e) 1776

Thomas David Lisk

The Heidelberg Whip

The Heidelberg Whip is what I called the scar that seconded the line of the General’s cheekbone and, when seen in the right shadow, made a tight duplicate smile off to one side of his lips, where a smile rarely appeared—never in my experience—though he had not been to Heidelberg and I didn’t then know about the Heidelberg jaw, a chinless human mandible as big as an ape’s and believed to be 400,000 years old, and the famous dueling scars as badges of honor were a thing of the past, a symbol of the rigor of Deutsche discipline that fit him perfectly as a symbol, but was discordant with the fact that he had been born and brought to adulthood on the wrong side of the Atlantic, and the suggestion of cruelty manifest in the scarred face as well as in the culture that encouraged such scars (though the boys who drew swords were playing out a ritual of not fighting), was in this case quite misleading, for in his dealings with passive civilians such as I, he was more than civil—mild, even gentle—and the scar that made a wide U between his left ear and nose was indeed more neutral than most objects of imagination.

Joshua Corey

From Severance Songs

•

In the garden it curled her toes to say,
“The gardener is invisible, we can never hear him working,
he leaves no sign. Things grow—green effloresces and dies
into a fugue of orange paper. No word precedes his passing,
no imprint of foot or gloved hand on these beds
than what frost or hoof can put there.”

It was autumn again and a freakish warmth
was stalking among the perennials. She said,
“But of course if we can’t see him, if he deposits no trace,
what difference if he exists? If I’m your bride
and the thought of you alone sufficiently sends my blood
a bit closer to the skin, what papers can prove
we’ve married?” It was autumn as I’ve said,
which means the sap of motion was still enough to see.
Two crows glanced and fell in imitation of the leaves.

•

Panting theft a child said to me, *Whose is the grass?*
Alive in spite of salt, green to Daisy’s dock
where aluminum canoes oar quietly by.
Hand of blades spilling, paints pants, stained alive-o—
so nasty making is gift. A whine of mowers
beats back the Sound as the length of Paumanok
gathers sound’s totality of motion, seizes stillness,
makes our ears to hear the prismatic lispings speech
so that these houses form a line along the blank slate
of the water. Verbals in formation own it all,
creased from above as seen from inland, or
up to island elevators. Solitary, shredded, patched.
A child skins his knees on the lawn, falls, laughs,
skids, falls, cries, sinks, under the roof of his head.

LIT

176

Joshua Corey

LIT

177

Joshua Corey

•

This poem is the war on a very plain level. Look at it cherishing you. Look how it places itself in the hands of the terrorists who have not already won. Now it shakes its can full of tax dollars and rains exploding food on the countryside. We recognize the sand, you and I, we deplore the poem and the rage that is not bravery or counter intelligence. Suffering is reasonable as love but this poem can't barber its own hook clean. It twists in the shrapnel breeze of our credibility. It is made above all of words disarranged to resemble an obvious truth. This poem catches your hands and wrings them. It has no reflecting surfaces. This poem does not spill a drop of the fluid that is yours.

Betsy Johnson

Move the Space

You don't like to travel, he says which means she doesn't go where he wants. She gets him another drink because she doesn't want to and because she wants to she can't say *I go everywhere to hear you telling me it's not the place I should be*. This father and daughter sit outside her house in chairs that haven't been fixed yet, the way they do every Sunday. *Knock it off*, she yells again to her son and daughter. Her daughter, left alone, practices whistling. He didn't want to be a doctor. Wounds that made him sew like a woman, but his father was a doctor, so he wants his daughter to work in Tokyo. Or Egypt. Maybe then he'd have something to talk about since he doesn't play golf. Or maybe he just wants her far away so he can get on a plane and try to move the space between them.

Adriana Grant

Family Restaurant

We're all out of Reubens and everything chicken. We had some earlier, thank you. She's a ketchup only kid. Twelve twisted pigtails, each with its own plastic barrette. Different children have different dislikes and even the same children cannot be relied upon for consistency in their prejudices. A doughnut is not meant to age beyond four hours.

LIT

180

Adriana Grant

Geof Huth

Title

LIT

181

Geof Huth

Amy Sickels

The Orphan

The summer of 1984 my parents moved us from Cleveland to Melbourne, Ohio, deserting polluted Lake Erie, sprawling apartment complexes, and miles of concrete for evenly-spaced rectangular green lawns, neighborhood barbecues, and an annual Tomato Festival. I learned a new word, *cul-de-sac*, which is where our new split-level home sat.

On one side of us lived the retired Steins with their three toy poodles, Darla, Marla, and Poofie, and on the other side lived the Crimsons. No girls my age lived in the neighborhood, but there was Brian Crimson, with hair like Wonder Woman, the longest hair I'd ever seen on a boy, and scrawny scarecrow limbs, Brian who owned a collection of mutilated Barbie dolls and whose favorite movie was the musical *Oliver!*, which he invited me to watch in the basement-cum-playroom of his house. While gorging ourselves on those packaged oatmeal cookies with cream in the center, enough sugar to light us on fire for days, we watched sweet Oliver (Mark Lester), the charming runt of the pack, appear on the TV screen, and I can tell you this: we were transfixed, transported, and afterward, adjusting our eyes to the bright daylight, we did not have to say what was true, that we were in love with little Oliver, his wavy blond hair and teary eyes and English accent. When he said, *Please, Sir, I want some more*, our hearts broke.

We were eleven, on the verge of entering the sixth grade, and probably too old for such a babyish movie—maybe at this age, if we were ambitious, we should have been reading the real *Oliver Twist*—but we were drawn to the images of little Oliver pining for his mother and palling around with the other tougher, wiser boys who taught him how to pickpocket and steal hot loaves of bread. Brian believed the boys could be his brothers and my boyfriends. I wanted no part of that; I wanted to be one of the brothers.

“You’re a girl,” Brian accused.

“I can be the sister.”

“Not the same thing, stupid.”

I shoved him. “Good. I wouldn’t want to be your sister, anyway.”

We rode our bikes to Willow Creek, about a half a mile outside of town,

a coveted dwelling hidden by sycamores and weeping willows, and only a block from the 7-11 where we bought cherry Slurpees, Pixie Sticks, and sometimes Tiger Beat, depending on which pretty girl or boy glossed the cover. During the day, Willow Creek was ours. We rode our bikes through the muddy, shallow water, skipped rocks, and once tried to build a raft like Huckleberry Finn. At night the teenagers took over, leaving us their empty beer cans, cigarette butts, and used condoms—we waved the deflated, wrinkled prophylactics on the ends of sticks, and then poked at them, as if something might crawl out. We never worried about the teenagers appearing during the day. They were vampires, sleeping off hangovers and fights, never feeling the morning sun on their faces.

“I wish I was an orphan,” Brian said.

“Me too.”

“Once I ran away and the police came after me. They found me in Huntington,” he said. “I spent the night in the park.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“It’s true.”

Brian had small, elf-like features. His tiny teeth crowded his mouth, and his nose, eyes, and ears were petite and delicate. I was bigger than he, although he wouldn’t admit it. And faster. My father told me I ran like a gazelle. If I ever ran away, I wouldn’t go to Huntington, but back to Cleveland where my friends were, and I wouldn’t get caught.

I had now known Brian for exactly twenty-seven days, and I knew he was a liar. *A fibber*. This was one of the reasons I liked him. Brian would say anything to make the day more exciting. He was a scrawny, weird kid, with eyes that sparked. He had *ideas*.

He threw a heavy rock in the water, causing a small splash. “Last year Lisa Milligan got caught kissing Danny Rice.”

“What happened?” I asked.

“They were in the coatroom. Mrs. Packer caught them. Danny had his hands up Lisa’s shirt, like this.” He turned to show me, running his own hands up under his T-shirt. He squirmed and made a kissy face, and we both laughed. “They stuck their tongues in each other’s mouths,” he added.

“That’s disgusting.”

“Yeah,” he said. “Gross.”

The air was muggy and thick, too hot to play, and so we lay on the bank, avoiding broken glass and sharp pieces of rusted metal, and watched the creek for something new, maybe a secret letter stuffed inside a bottle, float-

ing downstream.

“This town is so boring,” Brian said. “Nothing ever happens.”

“You should move to Cleveland with me,” I offered. “I know the city. I know where we could live.”

“It’s still Ohio. It’s still boring. I’m moving far, far away, maybe even to another country. Like Egypt.”

Nothing appeared in the creek except the usual waterbugs and occasional plastic bottles, the labels peeling off. We had given up on seeking adventure, and we reclined on the dry, hard-packed mud, looking up at the bright sky and the tips of the trees. We were not prepared to see Mike Watts, the fourteen-year-old who had flunked the eighth grade, crash his bike through the brush, slamming on the brakes and spraying dust in our eyes.

I’d never seen him, only heard Brian talk about him, but I knew exactly who he was. Brian had described the junior-high kids I would encounter in the fall. Mary Freedman was the richest; Tina Baily the smartest; Terence Smith was the only black student; Barry Cohen was a Jew; Mark Mandel, Jeff Thurman, and Scottie O’Brien were the most popular boys, always picked first for the teams in PE; and Belinda Rice, Jenny McDowell, and Lisa Goodall were the most popular girls, friends with Mark, Jeff, and Scottie. The kids to watch out for were Mike Watts and his friends. Mike Watts, the undisputed leader, administered swirlies (dunking kids’s heads in toilet bowls and flushing), stole lunch money, smoked cigarettes, and drank beer, but sometimes, Brian insisted, he was *nice*. I didn’t believe Brian. Especially now that I saw Mike in the flesh.

I knew him by the blue-fanged snake tattoo curled on his chest. Nobody else in Melbourne had a tattoo, or at least nobody that young. He had looped his black cotton T-shirt around the handlebars of his bike, revealing his bare chest, ribbed with muscle. Brian and I focused our attention on the running water, as if he might go away if we refused to look at him, but it didn’t work like that—Mike was the type of boy who demanded to be seen. He stood over us and spat a wad of something that nearly landed on my hand.

“What are doing here? Hey, babies, can’t you talk?” He stood over us. I could smell him, the terrifying strength of him.

“When you gonna get this hair cut, faggot?”

The word didn’t slice Brian open, didn’t even seem to phase him, but I could feel it burning into me, a new word, *Faggot*. “You better watch out,” Mike continued. “When school starts, we’re gonna cut that hair for you.” He emphasized the we, the majesty and mystery of the first person plural pro-

noun, Mike and his followers, an invincible we.

Then he slowly petted Brian on the head, not with menace, but softly, kindly, before lighting a cigarette and directing a small stream of smoke in our eyes. *Nice. Mike was nice.* He sat on the bank next to us, looking across the creek, and we stayed still, as still as we could, like quivering puppies.

“You new?” he said to me.

“Yeah.”

“What’s your name?”

“Lorie,” I said quietly. “Lorie Carmichael. I’m from Cleveland.”

“Why did you come to this shithole?” He said this in a way that made it clear he wasn’t looking for an answer. He stretched his arms up toward the sky, and the tattoo snake grew.

“Did it hurt?” I whispered.

He hesitated, his jaw flinching. Didn’t look at me. I moved in closer to hear his words.

“A little. My brother Danny did it for me. He’s got a dragon on his arm. Wanna touch it? Go on, it don’t bite.”

The muscles in his chest twitched when I reached for the little blue snake, small enough that I could cover it with my hand. The tattoo didn’t feel like anything special, but his skin felt smooth and blue, and I wanted to keep my hand rested there, just below Mike Watts’s heart. Then he stood, my hand slipped away, and he petted Brian again on the head. “See you later,” he said, and I felt left out of the “you,” understanding if it was Brian’s head he touched, it was Brian he was talking to, but then maybe he had been talking to me, since I was the one allowed to touch the ink animal that stained his skin for life.

Our families could not have been more different. My father was an accountant, a shy, nervous man who seemed happiest when he was watching a baseball game on TV. He liked Orange Crush floats, and together we sat on the couch and watched the Cleveland Indians, our upper lips fizzy with ice cream and pop. My mother, who’d had many friends in Cleveland, joined the church choir upon moving to Melbourne. She attended Tupperware parties and planned to run for the school board. Whenever she wasn’t practicing with the choir or buying more bright containers for leftovers, she was cleaning the house, reminding my father and me that she didn’t like messes. My father called her *Busy Bee*. She had alert blue eyes and long hair that she pulled back in brightly colored headbands. She looked satisfied when fresh

vacuum lines appeared on the carpet, or when she organized the canned food in a particular order. It was the family I'd always known. I believed all families lived like mine until I was introduced to Brian's. My mother didn't like me playing at Brian's because it was *unsupervised*, but sometimes she let me go, relieved to get me out from under her feet.

Behind the white cakey walls and blue flowered curtains of their home, Mrs. Crimson lay in bed watching *The Price Is Right* and soap operas. She drank gin and swallowed the pills we later learned were called barbiturates. Mr. Crimson, whom my mother called *loud and tacky*, wore a gold horseshoe ring on his pinkie and spent most of his time on mysterious business trips.

"It's like you don't have parents. Like you really are an orphan," I told him.

Brian arranged his naked Barbies in a line. "My mom's buying me a car when I turn sixteen," he said. "She promised me, any kind of car I wanted. I'm getting a Corvette. A yellow one."

His mother gave him money for the dolls, a secret they kept from Brian's father. The degree of their alterations ranged from close-cropped haircuts to the more violent cuts in their stomachs, breasts, and crotches. I chose the lone Ken doll, whom Brian had decorated with various tattoos, and moved him on top of one of the naked women, and Brian laughed, which at once embarrassed and delighted me. When I arrived in Melbourne, I knew nothing of sex, but he taught me the necessary words, *tits*, *cunt*, *dick*, and tried as best he could to describe the process, something about *putting the dick inside the cunt*, about *hard-ons* and *blow jobs* and *eating out*, but even though he knew the words, he was also confused about the mysterious, vaguely horrifying actions.

It was raining, and we had nowhere to go. We had already played three matches of Sorry! The humming of Mrs. Crimson's TV, interrupted with her loud asthmatic coughing, echoed through the walls.

"What's wrong with your mom?" I asked.

He quickly looked up. "Nothing."

"Why does she always stay in bed?"

"She gets sick a lot," he says. "She's got a weak immune system, that's what my dad says. But Mom told me she'll get better. Then we'll go away in the yellow Corvette. Not my dad. Just me and her."

"Where?"

He tucked his hair behind his ears. "California. I'm driving us to California. Maybe you can come too. There are movie stars everywhere. And

the ocean. I'm going to be an actor. We'll go swimming every day. Maybe even surf."

Brian said he had an idea. I waited for him in his room, twice as big as mine and filled with toys he never played with, GI Joe action figures, a scrambled Rubik's Cube, the entire collection of Smurfs, and considered California. The word alone sounded freeing. We could be rock stars. Rich and famous. With that word, the world grew bigger, rolled out in front of us like a magic carpet. I wanted to go with Brian and his mother; all of us could be orphans, even Mrs. Crimson, without anyone to tell us what to do.

Brian returned with two tall glasses of milk and two blue pills. We'd recently watched a TV special with Nancy Reagan instructing us to just say no. We both liked the First Lady, with her skinny cartoon-like grandmother body and bright red lipstick. We had made a pact to never touch drugs, but now he dropped this tiny blue pill in my hand, and I stared at it, how pretty and small, and before I could argue, Brian swallowed his. "Don't worry, Lorie," he said. "I'll take care of you."

I wanted to believe him. A cool breeze blew in through the screened window and the rain fell harder, sounding like hooved animals running over the roof. He was watching me. I hesitated, then swallowed the pill.

We lay on the floor. The carpet was dark blue and soft. I heard the rain. *The rain*. Sprinkles landed on my face. "Do you feel it?" he asked.

"I don't think so."

"Close your eyes."

I did. I saw more blue. My hands sunk deep into the carpet. "Have you ever done this?"

"Once."

"By yourself?"

"No."

"With who?"

But he didn't answer me, or maybe I stopped listening. The thick, rich carpet held us up, flowing over us, carrying us down a stream. Did Mrs. Crimson feel this every time she took these pills? Could she feel her body open up and swallow itself, the edges of the room turning slippery, the sound of the world breathing?

That night I cried myself to sleep, wracked with guilt and fear, convinced God or my mother would punish me. I had betrayed them, and it wasn't my fault because Brian had *peer-pressured* me into swallowing that little dream

pill, and now there was a strong chance I could become a drug addict, a school dropout, or DOA. I prayed for God's forgiveness, promising Him that I would never take another drug. God looked like a cross between Abraham Lincoln and Ronald Reagan, wearing a suit and red tie and top hat. I prayed furtively to God/Mr. President to bless my family and the USA and to keep us safe from the Russians and nuclear war, that violent blinding light that would melt us from the inside-out. The blue pill had felt like swimming, like floating on pool water. The carpet had turned soft, carrying me into myself, more comforting than a prayer had ever been, lulling me into a sort of sleepy peace, and time had slowed down; but later, alone in my bed at night, with strange shadows darting across my ceiling, I thought about what it would be like to be dead for eternity: if Hell didn't burn me for taking that stupid pill, then what would happen when I died? Would I, like Brian believed, stay forever under the earth, with no chance of seeing my parents, or even lifting my face to feel the sun? Brian was a *bad egg*. That was my conclusion. A kid wrought with sin. If I separated myself from him, he would perish and I would live forever. I closed my eyes and imagined Oliver, one of God's cherished angels, singing to me, and wished I could swallow the sound of his voice.

Life without Brian, however, was dull. I spent the entire week with my mother, driving her and myself crazy. I moped around the house and complained there was nothing to do, until she finally suggested I find Brian (she thought Brian was *odd*, I heard her tell my father).

"I don't *like* him," I argued.

My mother looked tired, the skin around her eyes creased and wrinkled. Last night I'd heard sharp voices coming from my parents' bedroom, and I'd held my pillow over my ears to muffle the sounds. I didn't like to think that they had important conversations that took place without me, secrets tucked away in their room.

"He's your best friend," she said.

"Is not."

"Lorie, please, don't argue with me."

"Mom," I said. "Do you like it here?"

She shook a can of Endust. "Of course."

"But did you want to come here?"

"Your father was tired of the city, honey. Our lives are better here." She placed her hands on my shoulders and turned me toward the door. "Now go

on, play with your friends."

I went to the Crimsons' and didn't bother to knock. I found his room empty. On my way out the door, someone yelled, "Who's there?"

I stood in the middle of the disheveled living room, decorated with specked green carpet, a gold lamé sofa and matching armchairs, and dusty shelves cluttered with pictures of Brian, his father, and a young, pretty Mrs. Crimson, and I was afraid to move. Her voice croaked again. "Come in here, whoever you are."

I considered running. Then I heard the creak of her bed—was she getting up? I'd never seen her out of bed. Brian said sometimes she wandered the rooms, like she was looking for something. "Who's out there?" she called.

I peered into the bedroom, a mess of scattered clothes—blouses, flowered nightgowns, and most noticeably, lacy red underwear. If my mother, who I knew wore white, modest underwear, could have seen this room, she would have sworn Mrs. Crimson was a *cheap harlot*. Ashtrays, empty glasses, cluttered perfume bottles. On the wall above her bed hung two pictures—one of Elvis and one of the Pope (the Crimsons were one of the few Catholic families in town).

"Oh, it's you," she said. "Lorie."

I never knew before her that mothers could look messy and weak and angry all at once. I turned to leave, but she asked me to sit down. I hesitated. Her grin looked creepy, her mouth too large for her skinny face. There wasn't anywhere to sit except the bed, so I scooted as far away from her as I could, and it was still too close because I could see the hollowness of her pale eyes and the cracks in her fishy white skin. She was nothing like my mother. Her hands were thin and bony, and her breath smelled like stale cigarettes.

"I thought you were that boy."

"Brian?"

"Not Brian, not my son, for Christ's sake. *That boy*. He comes over sometimes. I don't like him. Do you know him?" Her body heaved with a raging cough that seemed to frighten even her. Her eyes opened wider. I waited for her to catch her breath. She said, "I worry about Brian. Will you take care of him? Will you?"

I didn't know what to say; I was only eleven, and I didn't know how to take care of anyone. But I nodded. She reached over and touched my cheek, and I had to stifle the yell that rose in me, feeling that icy finger graze my skin. I wouldn't go anywhere with Mrs. Crimson, not even California; she

was too close to death, infecting me with her voice, her stare, her pleas.

I invited Brian to the annual Tomato Festival, and my mother actually allowed us to go off on our own, as long as we promised not to speak to strangers, and it was a beautiful feeling of freedom as we ran away from the long tables where my parents browsed the different types of tomatoes (everything from marble-sized yellow pear tomatoes to bulbous, seam-splitting red beefsteaks), and the winning tomatoes (the largest weighing in at six pounds and five ounces), and the various dishes cooked with tomatoes (tomato pesto, tomato gravy, tomato pie).

We headed to the midway. We rode the bumper cars and the Zipper, nearly made ourselves sick on snow cones, funnel cake, and cotton candy. We were two grubby kids at a carnival, a boy and a girl, waiting in line for the fun house, the girl wearing shorts and sandals and a bright pink T-shirt, and the boy, jittery and impish, his mouth stained blue, telling the girl about witches and monsters, and promising to take her to the side show where the fattest man in the world sat on a stool and swallowed doughnuts whole. The girl, whose large eyes wandered the crowds, noticed them first, the ruffians, in denim and black T-shirts with the names of bands she had never heard of, smoking cigarettes, pointing, making jokes about girls. She tugged on the boy's arm, urging him to follow her to the other side of the fair, but he insisted one of them was his friend, the leader of the group, with the dark, dangerous eyes, and so, to prove it, he waved. Brian *waved*.

Immediately, they surrounded us, Mike Watts and his three goons, and one of them said, *Who are you waving at, faggot?*, inciting snorts of laughter from the other three.

"Come on, Brian." Again, I tugged his arm, but we had lost our chance.

Mike shoved him and he landed with his face in the dirt, and this brought bellows of laughter from all of them, but because adults were nearby, they left, not without calling him a faggot one more time, and not without Mike swearing to God *if you ever look at me again, I'll beat the shit out you, queer*.

Brian was sniveling and snorting all over himself. I didn't dust him off or wipe away his tears or help him up. I was a new kid, and I didn't want to wear the labels that had been tagged onto Brian. I looked at him and saw him for what he was, this crying, long-haired, puny boy, and I was ashamed he was my friend. Later when he tried to explain to me that he wasn't lying, that this was real, that he and Mike had played together, I didn't believe him.

I spent the rest of the summer alone and bored and hating Melbourne. I wrote letters to my friends in Cleveland, complaining of my misery. The summer had wound down to the final week. It was a hot, sticky day. My mother was in the kitchen mopping. "No, no!" she scolded. "Don't step on the floor."

"But I want something to drink," I said. "I'm *dying* of thirst."

She held the mop in one hand. Her face was shiny with sweat, her hair pulled back in a bright yellow headband, and she was barefoot, her toenails painted fuchsia. She was looking less tired, and I hadn't heard as many of the secret arguments coming from the bedroom. But sometimes I caught her staring at nothing, her eyes still and glazed, as if she were trying hard to remember something from a long time ago.

"Honey, can't you go outside and play?"

"There's nothing to do."

She tiptoed across the shiny floor and poured me a glass of Kool-Aid. "Do not spill." I stood in the doorjamb and dangled one foot threateningly above the kitchen floor. "I'm frozen...but it's wearing off," I exclaimed.

"Why don't you go play with Brian? Isn't it time you made up?" She held my face in her hands. "I don't want you being mean to him. Do you understand?"

She forced me outside under the glaring sun. I rode my bike around the neighborhood, not especially looking for Brian, but a secret part of me hoping I'd find him and that we could be friends again. Even though I would never admit it, I missed him. I had just caught the last half of *Oliver!* on TV, and the movie filled me with longing and a self-proclaimed purpose, which my mother had just now solidified for me: I would run away with Brian. We would become orphans.

I discovered his bike leaning against a tree at Willow Creek. I knew it was his bike by the bright blue frame, red handlebars, and the playing cards slid into the tire spokes. I didn't call his name. Instead I crept down the worn path and planted myself under the weeping willow to spy on my ex-best friend who had thousands of secrets. My neck and underarms were damp with sweat. A spider scurried over a rock. I held my breath and looked across the creek, and in the stifled silence of that hot, exhausting summer day, with the branches of the tree swept down around me like a cascade of rain, and the creek littered with aluminum cans and candy wrappers that rolled downstream like paper boats, I heard the silence of our childhood broken by the whispering and moaning of a boy.

They were on the other side of the creek, not quite hidden by the shadows of the tall sycamores, lying beside each other, naked and gleaming with creek water. They were *naked*. Brian and Mike. Mike and Brian. Shoots of wildflowers and reeds blossomed near the water, and dragonflies circled the blooms.

This was what I saw: Mike's hand was sprawled over Brian's head, and he guided him down the stretch of his body and my best friend crouched over Mike Watt's crotch, the shade of the trees moving like clouds over them, and Mike's breathing turned shallow and fast, his supine body rising to meet Brian's lips, the blue tattoo glowing from his skin, and his hands running down the arch of Brian's back and settling like anchors.

When school started (brand new Trapper Keepers, number-two pencils, sparkling erasers, zip-lock pencil cases), Brian and I were in separate classes. During lunch and recess I avoided him. He looked different now. His hair was short, after Mike and his friends had cornered him in the boys' room and cut off the Wonder Woman locks. Probably because his parents did not want him to have uneven, choppy hair, Brian showed up the next day with it buzzed, so that he looked even more frail, nothing but a splotchy fuzz on top of his head.

I'd told no one about Willow Creek. If I saw him in the hallways, I felt that same rush of heat and anger and disgust, the way I'd felt that afternoon, stuck there under the tree, afraid to look away. I had finally crept off and then peddled my bike around town for as long as I could, until I returned home, wearied and sweaty and teary-eyed. Brian seemed to understand and accept that something had happened between us. He didn't come over or call. Once in the cafeteria he waved to me and I whispered *Hi*, and then left him standing alone with his tray of food. Another time I just pretended not to see him. Lucy Grimes was my new best friend, lavishing me with scratch-and-sniff stickers, friendship pins, and beaded bracelets.

It was an autumn Saturday night that Brian knocked on our front door. He had a busted lip and bruised cheek. He said he'd crashed his bike into a telephone pole. My mother invited him to spend the night, thinking maybe there was some kind of trouble at home.

We watched TV and played board games, and didn't talk very much. When it was time to go to bed, my mother offered to make up a place for Brian on the sofa, but I said we could sleep in my bed together. She hesitat-

ed, *you're too old for that*, but then her eyes flickered over Brian and she must have realized how harmless he was, and how alone, because she relented.

In the dark, I couldn't see Brian's eyes, but I could feel him next to me. His hand touched mine. He told me he had watched *Oliver!* again.

"It's for babies," I said. "Anyway, you shouldn't love Oliver."

"I don't."

"Yes, you do," I said. "You love him just like you love Mike."

He rolled over on his stomach.

"Brian," I whispered. "I saw you and Mike."

He pretended not to hear me.

"I saw you," I sang. "I saw you."

"Shut up."

Then I turned him over and crawled on top of him. Nosing my face close to his, I could see his eyes widen. He tried to push me away but I was bigger. "You're not supposed to kiss boys. You're supposed to kiss girls." Then I forced my lips onto Brian's and kissed him hard, and he let me. He wrapped his arms around my waist, and I felt nervous now, afraid. I quickly rolled off him. He lay there on his back staring at the ceiling, and when I touched his face, it was wet. "There's something you don't know," he said. "I'm tired," I said.

I turned away, pretending to sleep. The space between us grew, and we fell asleep like that, back to back, not touching. Then some time during the night, I woke up and found us wrapped around each other like kittens. Brian rustled, then opened his eyes. Both of us were awake but still half-asleep too, with dreams fresh in our minds, and dizzy in this in-between state, we made promises to each other. We didn't move from each other's arms until the break of morning light.

The following Monday after Brian spent the night at our house, he didn't show up to school. Mike and all his friends were telling jokes, huddling in the corners of the classrooms, until they were called down to the principal's office. Murmurs and rumors began to circulate. I didn't listen. I was hoping to see Brian. I promised myself if I saw him, I would say Hi. I wouldn't ignore him. I would do whatever he wanted. I would run away with him, wherever he wanted to go. Even Huntington. Or California. Or Egypt.

During lunch Lucy Grimes found me in the cafeteria. "You're not going to believe this," she said, her eyes lit up.

Kids rushed past me with their green plastic trays, and a lunch monitor

yelled for me to move out of the way of the line if I was just going to stand there. I didn't know exactly what Lucy meant when she told me Brian had been caught touching boys, but by the look on her face, I knew it was bad. The cafeteria smelled of something sweet and burned and cheesy. Taco Day.

Over the next week I heard different versions of the same story: Mike and his friends invited Brian to a party, where he got drunk and then sucked each of them off *just like a girl*. Like all the other kids, I laughed, made faces, and referred to Brian by all of his real names, *Homo* and *Faggot*. Parents and teachers were concerned. There were hushed meetings. My father asked me if I knew Mike, and I said I'd never even seen him before. Once my mother said, out of nowhere, that she felt sorry for Brian, but I pretended not to hear her, just like I pretended not to notice her sometimes staring at nothing.

I never saw Brian again. None of us did. His family moved away, packed up and disappeared from the big white house, and soon it was as if I'd never even known a boy named Brian Crimson. I'm sure that for a long time after he left, the school continued to buzz with gossip, but it's not what I remember. I remember getting braces, and Lucy Grimes teaching me how to apply purple eye shadow. I remember roller-skating parties and shopping at the mall. I remember I never went back to the creek, and if I ever passed by Mike Watts, who had no difficulty shedding the experience, I didn't meet his eyes. I had trouble seeing him as I had that day under the sycamore trees, his body rising to meet Brian's mouth and his fingers digging into his back; now he was just Mike Watts, a tough, dumb bully, who a few years later would drop out.

But I also remember this: the last time I saw Brian was the night he stayed over. We fell asleep apart from each other, but when we woke up in the middle of the night, we were holding each other close. He smelled of baby powder. The Strawberry Shortcake sheets were tangled around our legs. He draped his thin arms around my neck, and I petted his head, the way I'd see Mike do on that afternoon, which seemed so long ago. *Will you still be my friend no matter what? Yes. Promise? Yes, I promise. Forever? Forever.* The open window carried in the autumn air, and the night was young and sweet.

Ada Limón

He Has Big Thoughts While His Wife Is Sleeping

He thinks the moon is too
important tonight, too full
of itself, it likes to think
it can walk on water
or something.

But the moon has no allegiance
to anyone in this town,
like a hand on a snow globe
constantly shaking them up
and down.

The Hardware Lady Repeats Herself

She fingers the number 3 key
on the cash register without
noticing this strange woman, pretty

but limp, like a wet cat or
a dead bird, her eyes unfocused,
darting around like fleas.

Her cleaning supplies are all
lined up on the counter like weapons,
their nozzles pointing toward her.

The hardware lady is thinking
of a threesome she had in college
and runs her fingers over a

bowl of thumbtacks, skimming the surface,
avoiding the sharpest points.
Will that be all? she asks

and the woman nods, but
seems not to have heard her,
so again, *Will that be all?*

Then nothing, as if together,
they had already answered this question
one thousand times and finally
that had been enough.

The Lady at the Hardware Store Gets Sad Again

The black flag rustles in its nest of sky,
some think on it as an omen shoved into air,
but this is a delicate matter of history
as it moves like a fish's tail, and its audience
of pigeons follow in formation to their rooftop
landing, their flight patterns obeying the call,
an army's return to its cement kingdom
by the water tower on Roebling Street.
Today, she is jealous of the person who holds the flag,
wants to be the one to say, *Come home to me,*
and hear wings answering from a distance.

LIT

196

Ada Limón

LIT

197

Ada Limón

Jerome Sala

Etymology of the “Barn”

The history of the barn offers unusual discoveries. For example, the “barn” began, not as a house for animals, but rather as a bogus medieval art form. Peasants wished to reenact the story Noah’s Ark, but, not able to afford the grand sloops preferred by clergy and nobility—and, in fact, often not near bodies of water—they would gather the livestock of the manor into the nearest church, whenever nuns and priests were off on holiday. There they’d put on Old Testament miracle plays.

The word “barn” arises from this practice, as once the farmland was emptied of animals (who were now housed in the local church), the land seemed cold and barren. “The earth calls out for its furry friends,/She weeps in her barrenness,” as an anonymous peasant poet of the ninth century put it. The church stuffed with animals thus became known as the “barren maker,” shortened, after transliteration into modern English (and the great vowel shift) into simply “the barn” (pronounced with heavy emphasis on the last two consonants). The animals of the Lord’s manor seemed especially pleased with this new structure as, before this practice was popular, they were often cold. In the era of nationalism, the nobility used this pretext for throwing the clergy off their land, and replacing them with animals. “I can’t afford to shelter people who take up the space of useful creatures. A pox on them and their houses—give me more barns!” (Sir Henry of Baldingsgate, 1023)

The Four Visions of Saint Nemo

Translators note: According to folklore, the following verses are attributed to the so-called “blessed Saint Nemo,” a figure historically popular among peasant classes. Legend has it that Nemo’s piety was so perfect that he was granted the gift of immortality—and it is claimed that the following poem was composed on his 400th birthday for the amusement and admonishment of his devotees—and his fellow immortals. He is an unusual saint. His feast day occurs irregularly; it is only celebrated on Friday the 13th. And as arcane as his legend may seem to us, anthropologists believe that “Nemonic” cults still exist in our world and that on his day, unlucky for all except those who venerate him, elaborate festivities and exotic rituals are organized in secret by the initiated. One of these practices consists of a kind of parlor game in which participants compete for the cleverest interpretation of the allegories presented in the visions. The winner is allowed to wear a replica of the saint’s leopard-skin robe, a ritual object said to confer great blessings. The allegories follow. It should also be noted that each of the four sections is thought to correspond to one of the four seasons, elements and directions. Unfortunately, no reliable guide exists to say which goes with which—and, as we have no key for the dense symbolism of the allegories, the text in itself offers few clues.

I.

behold
I beheld
a zombie
mounted
on a leopard
chased by

LIT

198

Jerome Sala

LIT

199

Jerome Sala

a savage clown
chased by
an angry monk
who berated
this parade
for refusing
to study
the occult

II.

for the monk sayeth
o cycle of the vicious
spinning in a wheel
of self-invoked terror
when wilt thou
stop clowning like leopards
with already dead prey –
what occult pleasure
dost thy savagery
derive from the torture
of mere zombies –
hast thou no love
for the toll-takers
who tax the roads
between the worlds?
the non-existent
must eat as well
as the existent –
behold
they are required
to sup together!

III.

and I
sayeth the blessed Nemo
saw that yonder clown
lover of polka dots
would worship the leopard's
hilarious hide
and that it was right
that zombie monkeys
would torture the gold
from the roads to paradise
to announce the coming
of the savage occultists
who would pride themselves
in damaging the world's parade
by composing opaque volumes
of cynical patter

IV.

now the zombie clown sayeth behold
and the leopard monk sayeth behold
and the occult parade sayeth behold behold
in a unison of savage voices
and I, Nemo, only I, behold what they beheld
and only I, the one known as Nemo, hold what they beheld and I behold
in the occult locket that is my heart
in the primitive rocket that is my smarts
in the pinafore that is the private dark sea of my private parts that part
along the way and the way out
in the song and the anti-song
which crash like the four worlds
when they demand more than four lousy worlds

only I, sayeth the blessed Nemo
mark a savage time
with the sometimes timelessness of time
and thereby remind the sometimes of its obligation to refuse further specification
to remain in the vague jade garden
of memory's regretful forgetful refusal to pardon
the creature who seemeth at once a clown a zombie a leopard and a monk
only I
redeem its dazzling damned diamond prism prison mind
by pity
for its unnatural abandon

LIT

202

Jerome Sala

Joe Wenderoth

The Day of Prayer, from Agony: A Proposal

Between The Womb and The Grave, there is a small lounge that is only ever inhabited by Country Doctors; it is called: *The Heart Of All That Is Not Contagious*. Country Doctors only enter into The Heart Of All That Is Not Contagious on a Day Of Prayer, and they remain locked in this room until that day's Agony is ended. Having no television and no way to hear or see the Agony underway, Country Doctors never know how long they will remain locked in The Heart Of All That Is Not Contagious.

The Heart Of All That Is Not Contagious is a square room, fifteen feet by fifteen feet. It has a white leather couch against each of the three walls not possessed of a door. Beside the door, there is a sink and a small table with a coffee maker. In the center of the room, there is a large coffee table, on which there are displayed three magazines wrapped in brown paper. Each of the magazines is the same, a photo journal documenting the previous season's Agony—one is more from the perspective of The Gods, one is more from the perspective of The Orators, and one is more from the perspective of The Animals. The photographs in the journals are still-shots randomly generated during The Poets' capturing of Agony. These journals are referred to as *Monstrosity Preservers*.

Country Doctors, in order to be released from The Heart Of All That Is Not Contagious, must destroy the Monstrosity Preservers at hand; the magazines are placed into a slot by the door that registers their identity and destroys them. If they are destroyed *before* the subsiding of the Agony at hand, they are then replaced, just prior to the next Agony, by the most recently ended Agony's Monstrosity Preservers; if they are not destroyed, however, before the Agony at hand has subsided, the Country Doctors have then forfeited access to the next Monstrosity Preservers. Country Doctors, that is, upon returning to The Heart Of All That Is Not Contagious, will find

LIT

203

Joe Wenderoth

Monstrosity Preservers that they have already looked into, and that they failed to destroy in time. By destroying—after looking into—Monstrosity Preservers, Country Doctors maintain at least a glimpse of the on-going playfulness of those in Agony.

Those with a view on to Agony are free to obtain, look into, and keep for themselves every newly released set of Monstrosity Preservers. Country Doctors, on the other hand, have but one chance (if that) to look into the stilled images of a previous Agony. This opportunity is all the more alluring because Country Doctors don't have televisions, and are not allowed to see or hear the Agony they are forever preparing or bringing to an end.

Julie Carr

From *Mead: An Epithalamion*

36.

But darkness whaling in.

Won't and wouldn't make.

Swimming with vision loosed on the grass.

Begin and cease and then again begin.

Ah edges drear.

Will move my arm.

Slap charge across space.

Echo thrown, echo bound.

Nor chair nor rest.

Nor exactitude nor tact.

Bound to unwrap.

Nor stand.

LIT

204

Joe Wenderoth

LIT

205

Julie Carr

49. The Outside Lamented by the Inside

The documented body is now freely distorted:
 elongated legs, expanded chest,

testicles tucked back against perineum:

deformity as an emblem for history—
 the body's own history—being born.

A bird at the window.
 Am I sure about that?

The nursery school teacher hasn't heard of *Toy Story* or
Toy Story II,

which is a bit of a put-on, a bit of an affront.
 Education as mere witness or "support;"

but what if the child wants to play at killing?
 The child wants to play at killing.

These somatic devotions—
 (this last thought unclothed.)

"But *why* do you want it," asks the sincere mother of the girl before the Barbies,
 "no, just why? What is it about it that makes you want it?"

Nothing. Just,
 wive her.

Erika Raskin

First Person Present Tense

Sometimes I can engage Greg in discussions about acts of omission versus acts of commission. But mostly he sits silent in front of the double-paned window and waits for me to talk. Occasionally, he seems reptilian the way he doesn't move, barely breathes. I have imagined the rapid protrusion of his tongue, the disappearance of insects. Often we just wait each other out. I'm in no hurry. I have no place to go. No one is waiting.

Like Greg, his office is soothing. The peach walls are decorated with stark photographs of ocean scenes that remind me of how little I matter. There is enormous relief in that. I wonder though, what the pictures do to my friend Alan. He is so afraid of being swept away that he must always touch something to hold on to. He has left his fingerprints on everything here. Even me.

I breathe in time with the electric clock, my fingers massaging the raised scars inside my wrists. They are souvenirs of failure. In moments when my darkest thoughts break through the medicine's muted barrier, I wonder if I'll ever get to her. I am terrified that my culpability means we will never again be in the same place. If this is what forever means.

Weeks ago I asked Greg what he wanted from me. Forgiveness, was all he said.

Outside, lush leaves have reappeared on the trees. They appeared without warning. I've spent a whole season here.

Nora's smile could wrench my self-control, pull on it like a powerful dog fighting a leash. Our bond was so primal that sometimes still, when she comes to me in my dreams, I wake to find my breasts full.

I could never get enough of her baby sounds and smells, her lispy words, her lumpy rear view in Pamper-stuffed overalls. Even her unyielding refusal to relinquish her pacifier secretly delighted me. After the pediatrician's lecture on pacifiers and orthodontia, Nora was to use her nunnie only at bedtime. Those first few days she kept disappearing into her bedroom. I trailed once and saw her grab the pacifier from the pillow, take a few frantic sucks and then put it back, her face flushed from the quick fix. I felt such crazy love

for her that I had to grind my teeth to keep from squeezing her too tight.

I think what happened was that I got confused about my loyalties. I lost my focus. Greg says it is a good sign that I try and take responsibility for what happened. He says I am attempting to regain control, impose order on the world. The alternative is seeing life as nothing more than time filled with random, destructive events. Which is worse, I wonder, guilt or vulnerability?

I am occasionally able to remember that Matt bears some of the responsibility for the chain of events. But not often. I don't normally listen to much of what is said during Group. It is anchored down by so much unhappiness I feel submerged. Judge Mary, who comes out of her almost catatonic silence only to pronounce fault or innocence, interrupted another patient once to proclaim Matt the real culprit. She walked to the middle of the circle and looked me in the eye. Your husband should have listened to you, she shouted. Her arms waved so high her dress rode up, revealing the symbols branded in her ashy skin. Before the orderly appeared to escort her back to her room, she screamed, You never should have moved to that place! Women should listen to themselves!

That much is true.

Nothing would have happened if we had lived somewhere else. If Matt had listened to me when I hung behind the touring landlord and whispered that the apartment was too dreary, that I wanted to keep looking. But my husband's shoulders dropped from my demands and the corona of impatience outlining his frame shone brighter. I acquiesced. As usual. All the way down the dreary stairwell I concentrated on not gagging on the cat smell while Matt talked about the affordability of the flat, its proximity to the university. In a half-hearted attempt to appease me he pointed out a swing set in the yard. After we moved in I went to look at it and found it was nothing more than a rusty relic of some long-forgotten childhood.

The apartment's gloom was overbearing. A chain of rooms ended in a kitchen where the dirty underside of marbled pink linoleum curled in the corners. Next to the refrigerator was a radiator that hissed and spat all year long.

Of course it wasn't the apartment itself that was so terrible. It was its closeness to the Wendells.

Greg says the choice of housing is not what Matt needs to be faulted for. He says my husband contributed to my loneliness, making me vulnerable to the attentions of another man.

Sometimes I'd catch myself talking aloud to my parents or Philip, actually

speaking the words that I normally just directed towards them in my head. Nora would generally ignore me, going about her own business, stringing buttons on shoelaces, humming unrecognizable tunes. But once, in the middle of dinner she repeated the end of a one-sided conversation that I had had. She was placing little kernels of corn onto her spoon with her pudgy pink fingers when she said, Oh dit, Phiwip, how could wu weave me? I was more surprised than embarrassed. But Matt's reaction was fury. He jumped up so violently that he knocked over his chair. He ignored Nora's startled tears and demanded an explanation for his two-year-old talking to her dead uncle. Whom she has never even met, he had shouted, his voice cracking in a crescendo of rage. When I tried to explain that I had just had a bad day, that Philip's birthday was looming again, that I didn't know Nora was listening to me, he called me crazy.

When we were newlyweds I believed that marriage would confer closeness. I don't know why I thought that. I remember lying next to Matt, my hand resting comfortably on the growing swell of my stomach, confessing my junior-year breakdown. I told him what it was like after my family was killed. I described the collapsed tent of sadness that covered me, thick and impermeable. I tried to explain what it was like feeling nothing. What being in the bell jar actually meant. I told him about the psychiatrist at the university who prescribed pills that made me not care about the strange sensation of my own absence.

That night, during the only time that I can remember honestly talking to him about my feelings, I took Matt's silence for encouragement. I said meeting him while I stumbled through my last year at Virginia probably saved me. While I breathed in his wonderful smell, ridiculously secure in the stability of marriage and impending motherhood, I told him about my anorexia. I described the disappearance of hunger that followed the funerals. And how the odor of food made me so nauseated I had to avoid the route to class that passed the cafeteria; the heavy sweetness of pancake syrup and greasy fish hung like a halo around the building. Not eating made me feel in control, I explained. Every time I skipped a meal, turned down an offer for a dinner out, or even drank my coffee black, I'd get a little charge. I was able to master a little bit of my world. The more weight I lost, the more empowered I felt.

That night I proudly took my new husband's hand and pressed it against the recent fleshiness of my thigh to show how much better I was. Meeting you changed everything, I whispered into his chest. And I kept talking, mis-

taking Matt's silence for love. It was later that I learned how much I disgusted him. An emotional trickster, he called me, a fucking basket case. That night, though, I lay next to him feeling secure and content as Nora tumbled inside my womb.

We met during Thanksgiving break. I was in the deserted dorm laundry room staring at my clothes as they lifted and fell in the dryer, imagining what each member of my family had been doing the moment of impact. I liked to think none of them were aware of the truck that barreled into the back of the station wagon. That no one glanced in the rearview mirror, or readjusted their bodies in time to see the blinding lights of the truck as it forced their car into the tour bus ahead of them, shearing off the wagon's roof in the process. I liked to believe that they were all laughing, looking forward to Philip's first varsity game.

Matt had been watching me gaze at the dryer and asked if I wanted popcorn.

He had messy black hair and slightly stooped shoulders. And a killer smile. It was the first time in months I was actually aware of another person. We sat together on the hard orange seats, him telling me of his plans for law school, me feeling like that first gulp of air after diving too deep. Disbelief and relief all at once.

We moved fast. I held on to him like a drowning person but worked hard to hide the desperation in my affection. It seemed to work. He soaked up my attention, no questions asked. I'd type his papers, keep both of our rooms clean and have sex whenever he wanted. I was pretty enough and non-threatening and he had no way of knowing that the hollowness I felt would often fill with a raging terror. He must have thought he'd found the perfect relationship. The perfect college relationship. Matt offered no verbal commitment about us, no suggestion that we would last past graduation.

My fear grew as the calendar thinned. Just once was I able to broach the future, only dancing close enough to tap out an oblique question, stopping myself from begging please, please, please, don't leave me alone. While I made hospital corners on his bed I asked where he thought I should apply to grad school. He shrugged off my veiled plea. I don't know, where do you think you should apply? A fugitive tear skied down my cheek and bled onto the pillowcase. I had no clue what I was going to do once my diploma was handed to me. But I knew I had to hold on to Matt, even if it was only to get through the semester.

I thought maybe I would return to my parents' place. Stay a while,

choose a graduate program. The house was paid for. I'd just need to cover utilities and food. Most importantly, I would be surrounded by things that my family had touched. I craved that. For days after the accident I slept in my mother's gloves. It was like holding hands. Then somehow in the middle of the night one disappeared. I keep the other in my purse now. Or I did anyway.

As I mapped my return, my plans for the future shrank to fit my tiny hometown. The more I envisioned going home, the more my goals reverted to those of my high school years. In Warm Springs, you don't rise up that much farther than your parents. Gifted children of the working class make gifted blue-collar workers. My college poetry awards did nothing to deter visions of answering phones at the local resort. I saw myself as the receptionist at the lodge, working at the same place where for thirty years my father drove the shuttle bus up and down the mountain, ferrying rich people between their BMWs and the ski lift.

I told Group once how things would have been different if I had followed this blueprint. I could have been content, I told them, leading that life. Alan asked why with my degree from one of the best universities in the country I didn't see myself as more than the hired help. First bewildered and then furious he gripped the seat of his chair with both hands. Unable for years to venture from the hospital grounds, this former victim of front-page child abuse yelled at me, little droplets of spit splattering from his scarred and wizened mouth. With the opportunities you've had, Alan screamed, you could run that damn resort! You must be crazy, he exclaimed, which made everyone laugh, even me. But he had missed my point.

Everything changed in early May. We were supposed to be clearing out our rooms to make space for summer-school students. My fear of this was evidenced by the paltry number of boxes that I had collected for myself. Matt had come over with two bottles of wine and an acceptance letter. He'd been taken off the wait-list and offered an actual spot at the university. He wasn't going to have to leave Charlottesville for some second-tier law school after all. We celebrated for hours, him talking about the future, his future, while my heart beat in my throat. I'd smile and drink, smile and drink. I filled my hollow center with alcohol, until the panic subsided and nothing hurt.

When we ended up in bed, I had a momentary thought of getting up for my diaphragm, but it passed so quickly that I'll never know for sure if I intentionally conceived Nora or if the wine affected my ability to put thoughts into action. I do remember the dread that started in my fingertips the next

morning when I went to remove the hard rubber rim from my body and it wasn't there. I didn't tell Matt about my oversight.

Until I had to.

When I said my period hadn't come his eyes closed as if he could will himself to disappear. I think now he intended for us to have a long-distance relationship. One that would have petered out as soon as something better came along. But Matt is Catholic. And decent. We married.

The ceremony was before a magistrate. We waited with four other couples off an office full of civil-service workers. The area vibrated with activity, an incessant drone of voices and phones that made my head ache. Occasionally one of them would peer in at us, interested, I suppose, at our friendless weddings. Sweat rolled down my sides, catching on the elastic of my underpants. Two dark spots appeared on my dress. I saw Matt notice and look away. The procedure took six minutes. Instead of a honeymoon, Matt went home to his parents to tell them of our marriage. Alone.

When we moved into the apartment, I shopped yard sales and thrift stores. Matt would barely feign enthusiasm for my decorating and I would tell myself that the first year of marriage is full of adjustments. His workload increased with my pregnancy. By the time I was uncomfortable, with constant leg pain from sciatica, he was hardly home.

The change came when Nora was born. Although it was his daughter that Matt fell in love with, I basked in the spillover warmth as though it were meant to include me. I had a family again. Nora spent her first months in a bassinet in our bedroom. I would turn on the lamp in the middle of the night and watch as her ruby lips sucked diligently on her pacifier and her eyes flitted behind her lids, dreaming of things without names.

She could bring me to tears.

Despite his bond with Nora, Matt reverberated with tension. I bothered him. No matter what I did, and I was always trying to please him, he would end up annoyed with me. I would iron his shirts to save money and he would get angry at me for cutting corners at his expense. Or I would try and make a nice dinner and he would accuse me of not watching our finances. It was the inconsistency of the criticisms that left me so unsettled. I never knew what was going to be wrong. By the end of an evening my shoulders would be throbbing, aching from being raised in anticipation of verbal assault.

During the days I would talk to Nora, sing to her, make tents of quilts between the couches and crawl in with her. I didn't realize for months how lonely I was.

Until Ben.

By the time the Wendells moved in my need for adult companionship was so strong that I was afraid Ben would smell it on me. In the beginning, I would invent things to borrow during the day so I could go downstairs. Then Ben would invite me in and we would have coffee while his boys napped and Nora played with their toys. I sought out Ben's company and not his wife's because he was home during the day.

And because she scared me. Carla was a triangle, Ben a circle. He was soft and blurry, given to rambling sentences that gently wend their way back to their beginnings. He asked questions and waited for replies. When he smiled the lines in the corners of his eyes reached down to meet the curved dimples around his mouth. Carla's smiles were fast as door slams. She always seemed to be studying me, dismissing her findings. To hold her attention long enough to finish a sentence, my words would come out in a rush. She invited no closeness. Of anyone. Even her boys sought their father when they needed something.

Space around Ben was not defined. He was a toucher, a patter, a hugger. If you sat in the fat chair in their living room, he'd sit on the arm. Back when we flirted with the possibility of being couples friends, Ben made Matt so nervous by offering to massage a pulled shoulder muscle that my husband recoiled, slamming his elbow into the wall.

Nora was a toucher, too. She loved to cuddle. Once when I pinched a tiny black lash from her cheek for her to wish on she squeezed shut her eyes and whispered that she'd like to be small enough to fit in my pocket so we could be cozy forever.

Ben and I eventually settled into a comfortable schedule. I no longer thought of pretenses to visit. Every morning after Matt and Carla left for the university, I would gather Nora and her things and head downstairs. We would have coffee while the children ate cereal and little boxes of raisins. We talked of many things. I told him about my family. Not just their deaths, but who they were. The beautiful pottery my mother made in the Adult Extension course, my father's staunch support of the Democrats, Philip's secret tattoo. When I told him my mother was working on a set of dishes for me before the accident, I cried. Ben pulled me to him and let me soak the front of his shirt with ancient tears.

He was a photographer. He juggled care of the twins while freelancing for the paper. Stupid shots, he called them. Spelling bee winners, snowmen, amazing animals who found their owners after years of separation. His

passion was photojournalism, taking portraits of lives. His portfolio was chilling. It was filled with poor people, people doomed from the start. One picture still haunts me. A black-and-white showing an evicted family going through their belongings on the street; a little boy with shorts drooping below his Superman underwear, crying.

Ben worked out of the small garage in summer and the basement in winter. The change of seasons was heralded by his change of darkrooms. Winter's early approach was marked by the banging of chemical trays as they were transported from the shed to the basement. The cellar reeked of bleach and decay. He hated working there. Last year, when his breath still hung like smoke before his face, his eager anticipation of spring propelled him back out to the shed. I told him he reminded me of a snow-covered crocus bloom, rushing the seasons. He hugged me. And gently pushed my hair from my eyes. He made me feel so beautiful.

The first time we kissed was on a hot August afternoon. I had taken Nora out, aimlessly heading in the direction of the university. The street was crowded with eager high school students touring the campus. For some reason I stopped in front of The Virginian and looked in the window. Sitting at a table with three others, his arm casually draped over the back of a woman's chair, was my husband. He was laughing and eating French fries off her plate. There were half-empty pitchers of beer, cigarettes in the ashtray. All of them seemed so familiar with each other that I just stood there frozen. I didn't know who any of them were, which was more crushing than the exclusion. I ran most of the way home, the stroller clearing a path like an ambulance at an outdoor concert. I practically flew into Ben's apartment. The old emptiness was looming again.

The Indigo Girls were on the stereo and the prism that hung in the window was making rainbows on the wall. Ben came out of the kitchen holding a dish that he was drying. He saw my face and reached for me. He held me and stroked my hair. Told me that I deserved better. That I was special and kind.

He led me into the bedroom, putting his fingers to his lips to make sure I would not wake the twins or Nora who was asleep, strapped into her stroller. By making no noise, uttering no sound, I acquiesced to the physical comfort. I hungered for it. I hungered for Ben.

There are still mornings I wake wet, dreaming of him.

We stopped ourselves from making love, that day and the ones that followed. Neither of us could cope with the guilt. It seems so odd now, the way

we would pull back just short of penetration, as though his entering me was the only thing that should have made us feel disloyal. In truth, it never mattered how we touched. Everything we did felt so good, so right.

Long before our first caress we took walks, coordinated laundromat runs and had weekly unruly trips to the grocery store where we would race down the aisles while the children cheered us on. I know people looked at us and thought about what a happy family we were. I wanted them to. I played to the pretense. We would plan field trips to the Children's Museum and picnics at the airport. Once, towards the end, we went to a movie but we had to leave early because James hated being in the dark.

Sometimes, during Quiet Hour here I feel the pinpricks on my skin that forewarn a bad time. I sit helpless on my narrow bed and wait for guilty memories to rush over me. They splash against the furniture, flood the room. I remember when for no reason I said no to the replaying of a video. I remember Nora's bottom lip quivering when I snapped that we didn't have time to read a book, that we needed to hurry to go downstairs. So I could get to Ben. It's the memory of the evening when I could have changed everything that finishes me off, pushes me under with tidal force. I was giving Nora a bath after a long afternoon with the twins. Out of nowhere she said, James scares me. Instead of talking with her I ended that conversation by telling her that some children like to play rougher than others. She looked at me, bewildered giving way to hurt.

Nora turned away from me and began to hum.

At night she comes to me in my dreams wearing the denim overalls she was wearing the day I lost her. It was her favorite outfit because there were pockets for each treasure, a Chapstick she called lipstick, a pencil, and the shiny smooth stone that Ben had given her. I see her climb up onto the couch so she can be close to the boys, to be cozy. On her hand is the Winnie the Pooh stamp the nice nurse had put there earlier. It has not faded. She always says the same thing. The words she spoke in the bath. James scares me. This dream ends with me trying to tell her that I will protect her. But the words get stuck. Nothing comes out of my mouth. The light in Nora's eyes dims at my failure.

I wake up gasping. The dream never fades. It is real.

Ben confessed his fears about his son following an aborted trip to the library. James had had another one of his rages, screaming and kicking at the other children who were listening quietly to the librarian read a story. I had to help Ben gather everyone up. I felt his tension as he pulled James into his

arms so that he could carry him out. All of the other mothers were staring at us, waiting for the moment that they could judge the parenting skills on display. Please, I practically hissed at one of them, please move!

Ben sat at his table while I put a kettle of water on and sliced raisin bread for the toaster. Outside, a white wind was blowing snow around in a funnel. I can recall the momentary flush of pleasure I had as we were talking. We really were like a family. That passed quickly though. Ben was terribly upset. I don't think he's normal, he whispered. Our eyes met and I could offer no reassurances. Because something was wrong with James, something that was at first imperceptible but over time became more and more apparent. Especially when contrasted to Lex, his identical twin, his normal reflection. A vacant look would come over James's face and then a temper tantrum of unbelievable anger would follow. The triggers were nothing and everything. Too much laughter, or unexpected physical contact. Bad smells could fuel wild episodes of anger. Once Nora's dirty diaper incited head-banging. Often Ben would calm him by holding both boys tight on his lap and telling them long stories until James would shudder and fall asleep. I would wait until peace was restored and close the door gently behind Nora and me.

Do you think it could be our relationship, I whispered. Do you think it confuses James that we are together so much? No, Ben whispered back, startling at the whistle of the teakettle behind him. I remember his beautiful face taut and pained as he got up to pour the boiling water into the mugs. He said he wondered if James's behavior was a result of Carla's iciness—but then it would have affected Lex too, wouldn't it, he asked. I smiled, gave a helpless shrug, and asked what Carla thought. She's decreed tantrums normal for four-year-olds, he practically spat. She says I'm overprotective, old-ladyish. He told me of the time when Lex had angry red bumps over most of his body. Carla breezily dismissed Ben's concerns, so against her wishes he had taken the baby in to the pediatrician, who concurred with Carla. It was just heat rash. From then on Carla would use that event to illustrate either unnecessary expenditures or Ben's neurotic parenting. Whichever, depending.

I put my hand on top of his. Call the hospital, I said. Call the neurology clinic.

Two weeks later, the five of us squeezed into my little Toyota. The bulky snowsuits and Nora's car seat made the trip cramped and unpleasant. A smell of sour milk permeated the air. We arrived at the diagnostic center a soggy, unhappy group, the appointment ill-timed before naps and lunch. I went because Carla said she had a department event she couldn't get out of. Carla

and Ben had had a terrible fight about the appointment. Carla's angry words rose through the floor as though she wanted me to hear them. Change the damn time, she had shouted. It's your fault for not checking with me about my schedule anyway! I couldn't hear what Ben responded but I'm sure he tried to explain the cancellation would push the exam back weeks. Well, then get your little sidekick to take you, she had screamed, she has nothing better to do!

We sat in the waiting room studying the walls adorned with amateurish murals of extinct nursery-rhyme characters. Nora kept pointing at the bland faces, asking their identities. I assigned names arbitrarily until her little face flushed red with embarrassment for me. Little Bo Peep isn't a boy! she whispered urgently.

An overweight nurse in a pink uniform came out and led us into a small exam room where she took James's temperature and blood pressure. She measured and weighed him. While he was on the scale she kept moving the little metal balance to the left. Then she asked if Lex would like to get weighed. James got down and Lex hopped onto the platform. For some reason everyone had become quiet so Ben's sharp intake of breath sounded like a wheeze as the nurse pushed the metal farther and farther to the right. Lex weighed almost eight pounds more than his twin.

Before she went to find the doctor she took an inkpad and a stamp out of her pocket and put a bright red Winnie the Pooh on the backs of each of the children's hands. Nora was delighted and kept checking to make sure it was still there. Lex was nonchalant, but James looked at his wrist with agitation and was about to let loose when the doctor walked towards us, diverting his attention. A middle-aged man with weary, slumped shoulders, he mistook me for Carla, calling me Mrs. Wendell twice before Ben could explain that Carla was unable to make it to the appointment because of an emergency at work. He said I was the boys' godmother. Fine, said the doctor, and then we all fell in behind him as he led the way to the real exam room. He moved so quickly that I had to pick Nora up.

I try and recall the way she fit in my arms. I imagine her pink boots banging into my thighs. But I can't remember if I inhaled the sweetness of her hair.

In the room Ben placed James on the paper-covered table. Lex stood by his brother, quietly picking at the edge of the paper. James was silent throughout the exam. Has he been ill recently, vomited unexpectedly? the doctor asked, all the while studying James. Has his appetite changed? Do

bright lights bother him? What about noises? How about his balance—does he ever seem clumsy? Ben answered yes to so many of the questions that for a confused moment I thought that maybe that was good.

I offered different objects from the desk to Nora and Lex to keep them amused. I drew faces on tongue depressors, turned cotton balls into white wigs. I remember looking up when the doctor said, Mr. Wendell. My heart quickened at the seriousness in his voice. He was patting James's shoulder, the object of his concern. Ben was the color of a dead person. I didn't know where to train my eyes. The doctor cleared his throat and began. I'm afraid we have a problem. Although I can't know for sure—until we do a variety of tests—but I'm afraid that what we are looking at is a tumor. I can actually see something with just the ophthalmoscope. It is a discrete growth. I don't want to unnecessarily alarm you, Mr. Wendell, but I think you need to prepare yourself for the possibility of malignancy.

Ben doubled over as though shoved from behind.

I went to him and put my arms around his neck. I felt his sobs between my breasts. I bent and whispered, don't scare James, honey, don't do this. The doctor excused himself, saying that he was going to go set up the necessary tests. On his way out he patted Ben's shoulder and gently touched James's shoe. The little boy had curled up into a c on the table. Ben went to the sink in the corner of the room and splashed water on his face. The room was very hot. Eventually the neurologist returned saying he had set up admission for the next day. There weren't any available beds for that evening, he explained. So fast! I thought.

Somehow we all put our coats back on and walked through the hospital corridors, found the car in the garage, paid the attendant, obeyed traffic signals. I remember thinking Ben's life has just changed forever. We put the children in the living room in front of Sesame Street and I walked Ben to his bedroom. We sat on the edge of his bed, both of us crying. Why, he kept asking, why?

You need to call Carla, I said. He nodded but didn't move. Then he reached for me. And I let him. I knew exactly how he felt. He needed affirmation, a physical connection. We made love. But it was an act full of desperation and it was over very quickly.

At times I try and reconstruct the afternoon's events. I know we never intended to have any physical contact because the children were awake in the next room. When I calculate the extent of my neglect I admit to myself it was just moments. But it was long enough.

We lay next to each other. I held his hand while he cried silently. And then the surreal calm in the bedroom was pierced by James's howl.

He was shrieking. I DON'T WANT YOU BY ME! GET OFF MY COUCH!

There was an enormous thud and I froze because I knew. Nora, I shouted. Nora!

Ben was past me before I could force myself to move off the bed. NOOO! Ben screamed. Call 911, hurry, hurry! I could barely work the phone; I kept pressing two buttons at once. When I finally got through, the dispatcher's questions made no sense. All I could mutter was, ambulance, ambulance, please! I made myself go in the other room. The boys were huddled in a corner. Nora was convulsing on the floor. Her head had hit the fireplace bricks with such force orange clay dust floated in the air. Ben was leaning over her using his fingers to pry open her mouth. The fingers that had just been inside of me.

I approached them in a dream state and I saw the dent above my baby's ear. Her eyes were open. But Nora wasn't behind them anymore. I remember very little after that. Not dressing, or the ride back to the hospital, or the phone call the social worker made to Matt. I vaguely recall signing the form to give my baby's parts to someone else's child. The funeral was small, the coffin tiny. I tried to get in the earth with her. I was pulled back by a number of disembodied hands. I don't believe any of them belonged to my husband.

Matt said he might kill me if he ever saw me again. That I might as well have left his daughter with a gun while I went to screw my neighbor. I wished every one of his words were bats instead of weightless puffs of air. I try not to think of James. I don't know how I would feel hating a child.

Greg wants me to understand that we can only control what we can and we must let go of the rest. I am not comforted by this. He says I must think of the future. That I am still young, that one day I must go back to the world. He tells me he knows I was a loving mother. He tells me accidents happen. I tell him I do not want to leave.

It was Ben who found me after the funeral. He broke in and called the ambulance to our duplex. Again. Not long ago I accepted his call to ask him to leave me be. The last time I heard from him was by letter. The neurosurgery was successful. The tumor was not malignant.

Except to Nora, of course.

Annabelle Yeeseul Yoo

Simplicity

There is the morning coffee there is
the big sign leaning into a striped sky
there are the mirrored eyes and swollen lips
this morning.

It looks as if it might rain, that white nightie
hanging like forewarning on the horizon.

A hurricane is ripping up the houses
in Florida the dog sleeps in the corner and the wife
she has a tattoo and does not worry.
Why worry in the last? [sleep rolls on]

Someone's shoes float in the East River
and midnight was a long day leak.

Rob Cook

Sally Joy Newark

I answered the phone and a young woman asked, “Am I speaking to the man of the house?” “No,” I said, “This is the boy of the room.” She giggled because she didn’t know I was being serious, though I was at the age when I should be renting my own apartment and not living at home with my parents. “Who am I speaking to?” she asked. “Elbow,” I said. Again she giggled, this time higher in pitch, as if our ears were touching or sharing the same phone. “Will you take a short survey?” she wanted to know. “Only if it will affect what’s on television,” I said. I had no answers to any questions she might ask, my head filled with yellowjackets as it was, and told her this before she read the first one. “Are you the oldest male member of your household?” No, but my father wants me to become a teacher. “Are you the oldest female member of your household?” That would be my mother, who’s been carrying tulips her whole life, and says they are my brothers and sisters. “How old are you?” “Twenty-four,” I replied, this being very impressive to her since she was only nineteen. “Wow, you’re mature. I bet you have girls lined up and waiting for you.” “No, but I do have a ladybug I see when it’s cold outside.” This time she didn’t giggle. She said she could only do the survey with males over forty and females twenty-six to thirty-five. Instead she asked if she could call me later that night, when her shift was over. “Sure,” I said, and she hung up, without giving a name or number.

I spent the evening wondering what this young woman could look like, wanting to waste long-distance phone dollars, as every place was a long distance from Blairstown, on someone she knew only as a twenty-four-year-old male phone number. That night I poked around in the window screen for companionship—the usual moths who would die there shortly after I turned off the bedroom light, and the other dead moths waiting for a finger to flick

them away into the nighttime grass. I was shaken from my concentration by the ringing telephone, a kind of heart-attack noise even though I was waiting for that very ring. “Is this Elbow?” asked a nervous balloon of a voice. “Yes,” I said. Her giggle, a lit cow fly pulling a trail of gossamer milk through my room, made her younger than she claimed. She’d be better off on the other phone with my tenth-grade sister, discussing the school’s most eligible blue eyes. “My name is Sally Joy,” she offered. “I like that name,” I said. “Most of the moths I know don’t have names.” She then asked if I knew where Newark was, and if I could drive to her that night and stay with her, maybe let her go hunting for my funny bone. “What do you look like?” I asked. “I have brown hair and brown eyes,” she said. Then after a mosquito landed on a patch of my hand, she added, “I’m five-feet-two and three hundred pounds, but I’m not fat. I’m thick and shapely and packing it in all the right places.” Now I understood how she came to like me so fast. I started to have misgivings, and was afraid like the moths must have been afraid. “I’m diabetic. I’m on a strict homeopathic regimen of fasting and raw juices,” I said, which was true. “I’d need access to a juicer and a blender and a grocery bag of apples, celery, beets, and carrots.” “Oh, I live with my cousin. She has a blender. We also have crackers that you can eat cheese on,” she tempted. I told her that if I stayed with her, I would make a mess of her kitchen. “Cart all your stuff with you, my cousin won’t mind. I can help you with your fruits.” But I liked staying home watching over the moths as they lived and passed away between my juices and protein drinks, their inch-long fluttering that carried me to sleep; I told her this and she understood, but wanted a man with good nutrition because her mother was sick and dying from sleeping with too many husbands, thirteen in twenty years. “Bring your mosquitoes and your juices. You’ll see how much of a woman I am. And your moth lady, your ladybug, bring her—I’d like to meet her, too.”

LIT

222

Rob Cook

LIT

223

Rob Cook

Paul Killebrew

I LOVE THE WHOLE FUCKIN' WORLD

Wayne White: "I Love the Whole Fuckin' World," 2002.
Acrylic on offset lithograph, 29" x 41".

I guess there's a lot to worry about in the universe, but I'm so happy to have a body to fill these terrific pants and walk out of the house in the middle of the afternoon and survey my dominion, the stoop and the sunlight, the man wearing a cigar to a late breakfast of salsa, the water squeezing its way up the trees, the children screaming "Fuck a duck!" at their mothers. Ah, Nashville, you're hardly wearing a thing, and I've caught your cold six or seven times already. Does it matter if I keep the motor in my hips well oiled, or will there always be something between my brain and the rhythms that run under the street to keep me from understanding all the various meanings of disco? And if there are, so what? The beat avails not, the shoes avail not. Somewhere, somebody's having a birthday and someone's stuffing his fist in his mouth and somebody can't come up with a good enough reason to be alive and in love with the shadow that God makes on our side of the moon. But in the land that flies under the flag of this brain, it's time to turn to the doorway and say, "Hey lady, I love you so carelessly that I hate the pale indecision between us. No more theater, off your skivvies! If you get me pregnant, we'll be a miracle."

LIT

224

Paul Killebrew

Aaron McCollough

The Third Poem of Jan Vandermeer

I shave my face and launch a bottle rocket
I scrape the walk to lurch into the highway

My face so smooth like the subtle field of scales
As no one asks the threshold how the light works

Just saunter through and hallelou complexion
Verscheydenbeden world's fair the world is fair

And foul it reaches for me reaching for it
Above the city's face the breath invisible

That's mine
with sun behind the cloud of meaning
Of sunny civil gestures conversations

Vrau fair *vrau* foul and the littered tabletop
To battlefield a serpentine transaction

My taste of wisdom come
Through plasters painting hurts

This one's a little happy good for her

LIT

225

Aaron McCollough

Sonnet Manqué #1

as was alleged the grizzled man goes months

Candide the thrift edition sits here dumb

it's empty time! they celebrate with crumbs

and pirate suites on pirate ships *en garde*

my pistol-grip *épée* my devotion

I'm made of meat like them and do not change

but turn the verso me the recto me

an opening under the sun

in the breeze the turning world turns blowing

I know the rumor birds pretend to sing

we hear the will I say my prayers to them

the broke-wing crows the winged imprimaturs

so heavy is your disappearing bar

Sonnet Manqué #4

is just greatness and marvel absolute

the kingdom where I'm listening to limbs:

my thirty-dollar wheelbarrow (red) brims

with rainwater (mosquito eggs) the fruit

of empty space of comets named for sands

prepare thy face especially thy jaw

to bear it striking kingdom on the star

from waving heat absorbing angry hands

absorb the yard the squalling crow and jay

bortus inconclusus with all that sky

above it where generations have lived

(have rigged) the lilac tree and bleeding heart

the broken lyric of my awe and dread

I pass and wait for blows and strength to wait

LIT

226

Aaron McCollough

LIT

227

Aaron McCollough

Geoff Bouvier

I Will Not Excuse You, You Shall Not Be Excused,
Excuses Shall Not Be Admitted, There Is No Excuse
Shall Serve, You Shall Not Be Excused

—*Henry IV, Pt. 2*

Our culture hit a pocket of chaos yesteryear, a bad hair year. In some cases, it was the weather. In some, the people ate too many Twinkies. There were magnetic fields in many

Look it up. It's in the dictionary. Everyone was a monkey once. And some of us served as artist's models as kids. Anything can seem like a good idea at the time. Before the wind takes it, sun hits the eyes, and what's in the stars alights, spins, and plays its side out.

Meantime, watch your own cholesterol. And never do anything that's not in your job description, except for hit the snooze button. Advice from one whose inhibitions are finally constantly down. But who got old and tired learning the fundamental American lesson: *If you want to do it, then why shouldn't you?* Hmm. Ethics? Genetics? Heavy metal music? Faugh! Testosterone, P.M.S., it's all the same. We have these chemical imbalances. Everything's a conspiracy. Even to those who cry, appealing to some higher morality.

Hell, times are tough. Death. Bad Karma. Yet everything still looks good in commercials, explain that. In general, I'm not opposed to the experience of daylight. But then, there's these voices in my head. Moments of clarity.

So, what I mean is, I haven't had time to iron out the bugs yet. But I'm curious. And feel fantastically lucky.

Unless the power goes out. Again. Or if I can't find the words...

Trudy Rendall Ames

Stanza in Praise of Gertrude Stein

What is it to be if to be unveils endless mystery
Linger longer energy centuries eternity
I wave lethargically at the rain
Which if I remain indoors
No one will soak to death
Allow them to stay
Whatever it is I like
Whatever I suggest is this
Which without a doubt is mine
As mine cannot wish
I let them stay or make them go
Because I am alone
Of course I am alone
Down to the bone

LIT

228

Geoff Bouvier

LIT

229

Trudy Rendall Ames

Trudy Rendall Ames

Too True

Like the sun who occasionally scorches her way through this suffocating humidity, so do my sharp remarks sear the fabric of civility. Like leeches, words attach themselves to emotion, slither from my mouth across the table to my guest. They sting him between the eyes. I try to apologize, but it's too late; he's already bleeding, and I am purged (in spite of myself). Yesterday my neighbor asked how I like her new lawn sculpture. Without pause, I saw the words slip forth in a stream, "It looks like a broken oil rig." Sharp edges of a lie would sting like a full fist of nettles. Perhaps I'll die alone. All the wounded will gather, scratch "BITCH" on my gravestone, have a good laugh as they scamper away, alive with the pleasure of truth.

LIT

230

Trudy Rendall

Fernando Pessoa as Alberto Caeiro

Two Poems

Translated by Richard Zenith

WHAT'S MY LIFE worth? In the end (I don't know what end)
One man says: "I earned three hundred thousand dollars."
Another man says: "I enjoyed three thousand days of glory."
Yet another says: "I had a clear conscience, which is enough."
And I, should somebody ask what I did,
Will say: "Nothing except look at things,
Which is why I have the whole Universe in my pocket."
And if God should ask: "And what did you see in things?",
I'll answer: "Just the things themselves. That's all you put there."
And God, who after all is no dummy, will make me into a new kind of saint.

September 17, 1914

LIT

231

Fernando Pessoa

WHOEVER or whatever is at the center of the world
 Gave me the outer world as an example of Reality,
 And when I say “this is real,” even of a feeling,
 I can’t help but see it in some kind of external space,
 In a visual kind of way, outside and apart from me.

To be real means not to be inside myself.
 My inner self doesn’t have any reality I can conceive of.
 I know that the world exists, but I don’t know if I do.
 I’m more certain of the existence of my white house
 Than of the inner existence of the white house’s owner.
 I believe in my body more than in my soul,
 Since my body’s right here in the midst of reality,
 It can be seen by others,
 It can touch others,
 It can sit down and stand up,
 Whereas my soul can’t be defined except by outer terms.
 It exists for me – in the moments when I think it exists –
 By borrowing from the World’s outer reality.

If the soul is more real
 Than the outer world, as you, philosopher, say it is,
 Then why was the outer world given to me as reality’s prototype?
 If my feeling is more certain
 Than the existence of the thing I feel,
 Then why do I feel
 And why does the thing appear independently of me,
 Without needing me to exist,
 Me who am forever bound to myself, forever personal and nontransferable?

Why do I move with others
 In a world where we understand each other and agree,
 If the world is what’s mistaken and I’m the one who’s right?
 If the world is a mistake, it’s a mistake we all share,
 And each of us is mistaken only in relationship to himself.
 Between the two, the world is more in the right.

But why all these questions, unless it’s because I’m sick?

On the outer and therefore right days of my life,
 On the days when I’m perfectly, naturally lucid,
 I feel without feeling that I feel,
 I see without knowing that I see,
 And the Universe is never so real as then,
 The Universe is never (it’s not near or far from me
 But) so sublimely not-mine.

When in life I say “it’s obvious,” do I mean “only I can see it”?
 When in life I say “it’s true,” do I mean “it’s my opinion”?
 When in life I say “it’s there,” do I mean “it’s not there”?
 And why should it be any different in philosophy?
 We live before we philosophize, we exist before we know we do,
 And the earlier fact merits at least homage and precedence.
 Yes, we are outer before we are inner.
 Therefore we are essentially outer.

You say, sick philosopher, every philosopher, that this is materialism.
 But how can this be materialism, if materialism is a philosophy,
 If a philosophy, to belong to me, would have to be a philosophy of mine,
 And none of this is mine, nor am I even I?

October, 24 1917

Fernando Pessoa as Ricardo Reis

Two Poems

Translated by Richard Zenith

I SUFFER, Lydia, from the fear of destiny.

Any tiny thing that might

Give rise to a new order in my life

Frightens me, Lydia.

Anything whatsoever that changes

The smooth course of my existence,

Though it change it for something better,

Because it means change,

I hate and don't want it. May the gods grant

That my life be, without interruption,

A perfectly flat plain, running

To where it ends.

Though I never taste glory and never

Receive love or due respect from others,

It will suffice that life be only life

And that I live it.

May, 26 1917

DREAMED PLEASURE is pleasure, albeit in a dream.

What we suppose of ourselves we become,

If with a focused mind

We persist in believing it.

So do not censure my way of thinking

About things, beings, and fate.

For myself I create as much

As I create for myself.

Outside me and alien to my thoughts

Fate is fulfilled. But I fulfill myself

Within the small ambit

Of what is given to me as mine.

January 30, 1927

LIT

234

Fernando Pessoa

LIT

235

Fernando Pessoa

Fernando Pessoa as Álvaro de Campos

Two Poems

Translated by Richard Zenith

WHAT happiness

In the building across the street from me and my dreams!

It's inhabited by people I don't know, whom I've seen but not seen.
They're happy, because they're not me.

The children who play on the high balconies
Live forever, without doubt,
Among flowerpots.

The voices that rise from inside the homes
Always sing, without doubt.
Yes, they must sing.

When there's feasting out here, there's feasting in there,
Which is bound to be the case where everything concurs:
Man with Nature, because the city is Nature.

What tremendous happiness not to be me!

But don't others feel the same way?
What others? There are no others.
What others feel is a house with shut windows,
And when they're opened
It's for their children to play on the railed balcony,
Among the pots with I'm not quite sure what flowers.

Other people never feel.
We're the ones who feel,

Yes, all of us,
Even I, who am now feeling nothing.

Nothing? Well...
A slight pain that's nothing...

June 16, 1934

LIT

236

Fernando Pessoa

LIT

237

Fernando Pessoa

How many Caesars I've been!
How many Caesars I've been!
How many Caesars I've been!

Original Sin

Who will write the story of what he could have been?
This, if someone writes it,
Will be the true history of humanity.

What exists is the real world—not us, just the world.
We are, in reality, what doesn't exist.

I am who I failed to be.
We are all who we supposed ourselves.
Our reality is what we never attained.

What happened to our truth—the dream at the window of childhood?
What happened to our certainty—the plans at the desk that followed?

Sitting sideways in a chair after dinner, with my head
Resting against my folded hands, which are resting
Against the high windowsill, I ponder.

What happened to my reality, that all I have is life?
What happened to me, that I'm only who I am?

How many Caesars I've been!

In my soul, and with some truth;
In my imagination, and with some justice;
In my intellect, and with some warrant—
My God! My God! My God!—

LIT

238

Fernando Pessoa

LIT

239

Fernando Pessoa

James Tate

The Solitary Fisherman

I was out fishing by myself because Garrett had canceled at the last minute. I was surprised at how much I was enjoying myself. I had already caught my limit, and just went on fishing for the fun of it, releasing anything I caught. I was standing in the water with waders on, laying down my line as quietly as possible, then jerking it back toward me slowly. The sun had risen above the tree line, and now shadows played wildly on the water. The best of the fishing was probably over, but I couldn't bring myself to stop. It was such a perfect day. But then I became aware of the fact that I wasn't alone. I didn't look at first, and went right on casting and drawing my line in. I had my knife in its sheath on my belt, though I didn't expect to use it. Finally, I looked over my shoulder and there was a boy standing in the bushes staring at me. "It's a beautiful morning for fishing, but, still, you shouldn't sneak up on people like that," I said. "I didn't mean to be sneaking. I just found you here, and I was watching," he said. "That's okay. I'm about done for this morning. I got my fish, and I've had my fun," I said. I was wading out of the stream when he said, "You look like my father." I sat down on a rock and started taking off my waders. "What do you mean by that?" I asked. "Well, I have a photograph of him, and you look like it," he said. "All you have is that photograph?" I said. "You never saw him?" "That's right," he said. "That's too bad," I said. "I've never understood how a man could go off and leave a little baby behind." "Well, it didn't exactly happen like that," he said. "He didn't even know my mother was pregnant. He had joined the army, and my mother decided not to tell him. Then she had heard that he met someone overseas, and well, that was that." "That's a rough one," I said. I was packing up the gear, but the

boy didn't seem to want to let me go. "Were you ever in the army?" he said. I hesitated, then lied, "No, I'm afraid I missed out on that one." "Well, it was nice to meet you. Maybe I'll see you around again. By the way, what's your name?" "Gus," he said. "What's yours?" he said. "Garrett," I said. "Well, so long, Gus," I said, and drove away. I was shaking. I didn't know what to do. How could I have known? What could I have done? I pulled over to the side of the road and tried to think. Why didn't Teresa tell me? What must she have thought of me? I turned the car around and went back. I didn't find him on the road anywhere, so I pulled over and started searching along the stream. I wanted more than anything to be a father to that boy. Finally, I sat down and waited on the spot where we had met. Morning passed. Then, afternoon. I gathered some wood and built a fire and cooked those fish, which were delicious. I got my fishing gear from the car and started fishing again. I stood there in the stream as the sun was beginning to set, pulling them in one after the another. There's nothing quite like it. I did feel someone staring at me again, but he never showed his face or spoke a word. I waited and waited, but he never spoke a word.

LIT

240

James Tate

LIT

241

James Tate

The Vision

My friend Kenny had a vision. It told him that he had to quit his job, sell his home, and move to another town. He told me, and anybody who would listen, that he had no choice but to comply with this vision. I said, “Kenny, visions are like telephone calls—you can get the wrong number. It was probably just a dream, and you know how reliable they are. Last week I dreamed I was a duck. Do I look like a dick to you?” At least that got him to smile. “I tell you, Artie, when I first work from that vision there was no question in my mind what I had to do. God was talking right to me,” he said. “Oh,” I said, “I hadn’t realized it was that big. Of course you have to do what the Big One said. What if He told you to slay your family?” Kenny shot a look at me that practically guaranteed he’d follow orders. “Just a little vision-humor,” I said. But I wasn’t joking, and I’m sure he knew it. The papers are full of people who have taken orders from God. “Artie,” he said, “you’ve been a good friend all these years and I’ll miss you. But I can’t turn my back on this thing. God has His reasons for us to move to Springfield, I don’t know what they are. It could be to sell used cars, or to be run over by a taxi, I don’t know. I just know I have to move there.” “Gee, Kenny,” I said, “I never even knew you were religious, and I thought I

knew you pretty well.” “I’m not,” he said, “but, you know, I’ve been picked for this thing in Springfield.” “Could have been a lot worse.” I said, though I wasn’t quite sure how.

LIT

242

James Tate

LIT

243

James Tate

The Tri-County Fair

Michelle asked me to go to the Tri-County fair with her. She had never been and was curious to see what it was like. Against my better judgment, I agreed to go. Amidst the oversized cows and pigs, the swarming mobs jostling us, the grating organ music of the carousels, the flashing lights, even the thought of cotton candy, I felt weak in the face of so much strength and energy. Michelle seemed to be having a grand time, and I tried to put on a face. Michelle wanted to go on the Ferris wheel. "It's really for kids," I said. "Oh, Felix," she said, "please." My fear of heights was not consistent, so I had no idea how I'd do, and I did like pleasing Michelle. The moment we were locked in our seats, I broke into a cold sweat. As the ride started up I began to shake uncontrollably. Michelle was shouting, "This is great! Look at the view!" I closed my eyes, praying that that would bring relief. But it didn't. I couldn't catch my breath and my hear was amuck. This was the longest ride in Ferris wheel history. I was a wet rag of a man. I felt as if I had just fought World War II all by myself. But I was a better man for it, and the whole nation was so proud of me. I looked around. I had lost Michelle. I could barely muster the strength to push my way through the crowds. I looked for thirty minutes or more, during which time a Clydesdale horse stepped on my foot. I had asked a security guard to broadcast her name and my whereabouts over the p.a. system. When there was

no response to that, I grew desolate. Later, I told myself, there never was a Michelle. You just made her up to test your courage. And you failed again, old boy, you failed as you do every year, and that's why you have no Michelle, you big baby you.

LIT

244

James Tate

LIT

245

James Tate

Christopher Salerno

Try Loving Someone Who Doesn't Love You

Try approaching the light so sloshed all you do
is rise in the wafting breeze,

immense wings in,
click your thorax and go
outside.

In a stuttered sort of flight,
little circles,
before falling in love.

Sure.
All the emotion

and worse:
Brightness is
what she's made of.

As a result
the earth

never contradicts the sun.
In a fractured everafter,

tuck your two

Wings the color of bark?

powdery
unnamable

As a result
the earth

outcomes such as August, July.

Collected Marginalia

All are collected and checked for obscenity.

a possible beginning:
The sentiments of lovers

If I painted you w/out genitalia, w/out identity,
with all white flowers
folded in—

How else to paint the woman in the middle of the room?

And for those who stand beneath
the painting there
is no repose.

Missionary Style.

before tossing their thick glasses into the fire.

Each one

one note lower than sound.

Above you your shadow,
a slow pulse, acquiring you—

Pointing out how your shadow takes you,

How it comes, now, *grasping*
at your life, they say

LIT

246

Christopher Salerno

LIT

247

Christopher Salerno

Jean Tardieu

Verb and Subject

Translated by Marcia Mead Lebré

I have I have not
I had had I no longer have
I will always have

*A cap A wooden horse A
construction set A father
A mother Freckled sunlight
through the leaves Frog se-
renade at night September
thunderstorms.*

I had I no longer have
I will never have again

*The time to grow tall, to desire.
Cold water raised from the well
Fruits from the orchard Newly
laid eggs in the straw. The attic
The dust Pictures of showgirls
Ears boxed during piano lesson
The maid's naked breast.*

If I had had
I would still have

*Midnight flight into star
The blessing of the universe
Life's farewell in the midst
of light The end of all fears
of all hope Dawn unmasked
All the snares demolished
Above all things time.*

A Road

Translated by Marcia Mead Lebré

A road that is a road
without being a road
bears what happens
and also what does not happen

What happens has already happened
the moment I say it
What will happen
I no longer wait for I cannot overtake it

I fear to give a name to things
because each thing is born
and dies the very instant
I write it

I'll disappear myself
like all the things I say
in a loud uproar
of noise and cries.

LIT

248

Jean Tardieu

LIT

249

Jean Tardieu

Jacques Prévert

Child Hunt

Translated by Marcia Mead Lebré

For Marianne Oswald

Outlaw! Hoodlum! Thief! Urchin!

Over the island birds
All around the island water

Outlaw! Hoodlum! Thief! Urchin!
What are these shouts?

Outlaw! Hoodlum! Thief! Urchin!

It's the mob of honest citizens
Who chase the child

He said I've had my fill of reform school
And the guards had beaten him with the keys & broken his teeth
And had left him on the cement floor

Outlaw! Hoodlum! Thief! Urchin!

Now he's run away
And is tracked like an animal
He runs through the night
And everyone runs after him

The cops the tourists the pensioners the artists

Outlaw! Hoodlum! Thief! Urchin!

A mob of honest citizens

Are chasing the child
No hunting permit needed for children
All the best people have joined
What's swimming in the dark
What are these flares these noises
It's a child running away
They are aiming guns at him

Outlaw! Hoodlum! Thief! Urchin!

All these men on the bank
Are muttering and red with anger

Will you reach land will you reach land!

Above the island birds
All around the island water.

LIT

250

Jacques Prévert

LIT

251

Jacques Prévert

Rae Armantrout

Cursive

In my country
in *Toy Story*,

sanity meant keeping
a set distance

between one's role
as a figurine
and one's "self-image."

This gap
was where the soul
was thought to live.

•

When he thought of suicide, he thought,

"It ends here!"

and

"Let's do it!"

As if a flying leap
were a form of camaraderie.

As if a cop and his
comic relief partner

faced off
against moguls.

Crossed wires released such
hope-like sparks.

•

This thing was called
"face of the deep,"

this intractable blank
with its restless cursive

LIT

252

Rae Armantrout

LIT

253

Rae Armantrout

Away

The boy and girl leave
the tired woman behind
gladly.

They are off
to find their real mother,

she of the golden
edible house, the
cunning hunger.

•

From your snort of recognition
I can tell

that you are the baby
crocodile,

adrift
on a floating mat
of papyrus.

In your yellow, crescent eye
an insouciant attention.

•

Yellow flecks
of glitter
in the cement—

clusters?—

each a far-away
answer

to an ill-posed problem

LIT

254

Rae Armantrout

LIT

255

Rae Armantrout

Phil West

Honeymoon Days

Before you carry their bodies off the plain,
see how the smiles stayed blithe
in the hunter's scope, the fine film

forming over what they lived before,
the answering machine and its growing
chorus. It used to be

all scrubbed down, before the red lipstick
clichés sang down the mirrors, before perfume
cracked across the headboards. It used to be

a diorama of a living room, ghosted
in television blue, the hand resting
near the receiver, trying to coax a purr

from the cradle. They used to sing it from
the karaoke stage, wanted Cupid to come
with a crossbow. Now, they can't be any

more bullseye, glassy-eyed for each other,
as dumb and as perfect
as freshly fed deer at roadside.

Phil West

The Archeology of Morning After

Once you're willing to toast anything,
lift your glass to something half-heard,
you might as well toast trouble.
You've dropped your stock, from welcome

to unwelcome, in a swallow. You, just different enough
from the hundred others just like you. Your host gathers
your coats, collects your calling cards: lipstick
on the rim of a glass, a cigarette

dropped into a half-full cup.
Reason: it was there, there was a problem,
I solved it. Your host is learning to love
this furry logic, will chuckle days later

at finding the bottle slid behind the couch,
laugh the laugh that makes an empty room
more empty. The host will rewind, remember
the seeds of tiny mines birthed there.

You swear you can see Dionysus in the corner,
video camera in hand, rolling tape. You love the sport:
getting lost in other people's houses. You root
for the lemming at the cliff's lip, will recall

or not recall falling into your bed when you
return to your lived life the morning after. Little pieces
of you, in your absence, will lift from the carpet,
will be scraped from the tile, will drift

LIT

256

Phil West

LIT

257

Phil West

and marry the air. Your host will herd
the bottles, force the house to smile a snapshot.
You will be forgotten, but your
wreckage will be remembered.

LIT

258

Contributors

Contributors

Trudy Rendall Ames bio to come.

Rae Armantrout teaches writing at the University of California, San Diego. She is the author of eight books of poetry, including *Veil: New and Selected Poems* (Wesleyan, 2001), *The Pretext* (2001), *True* (1998), and *Made to Seem* (1995). Her most recent book is *Up to Speed* (2004).

Ellis Avery's work has appeared in the *Village Voice*, *Lieu*, and the *Mid-American Poetry Review*. While she usually teaches creative writing at Columbia University, she is currently in Japan, researching a novel set in nineteenth-century Kyoto. Please visit ellisavery.com.

On his bus rides around Portland, Oregon, **Ben Bagocius** is currently reading *Etty Hillesum: An Interrupted Life and Letters from Westerbork*, in which Hillesum writes, "Looked at Japanese prints this afternoon. That's how I want to write. With that much space round a few words. They should simply emphasize the silence."

Jim Behrle is the author of

Daniel Borzutzky is thirty years old. He lives in Chicago and teaches at the Wright College. His work has been published in many journals and a book is forthcoming at the end of 2004 from Ravenna Press. Recent writings appear or are forthcoming in *Bridge*, *Pom2*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Golden Handcuffs Review*, and *Fence*.

Geoff Bouvier's poems appear in *jubilat*, *American Letters & Commentary*, *Good Foot*, and elsewhere. His poetry manuscript has been a finalist in eight contests and counting. He holds an M.F.A. from Bard College.

Julie Carr's poetry has been published recently in *Boston Review*, *Seneca Review*, *Epoch*, *TriQuarterly*, and is forthcoming in *American Letters & Commentary* and *3rd bed*. She is the recipient of an Eisner Poetry Award and a

LIT

259

Contributors

Grolier Poetry Award and is currently working toward her Ph.D. in English at UC Berkeley.

John Randolph Carter: Poet and artist, born 1941; UCLA: BA, MA; Fulbright and N.E.A. grants; fine art in collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art; poetry in journals including the *Atlanta Review*, *Bombay Gin*, *Café Review*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Faultline*, the *Journal*, *Poetry International*, *Solo*, and *Story Quarterly*; work forthcoming in the *Cream City Review*, *Poet Lore*, the *Republic of Letters*, *Rosebud*, and *Oxford Magazine*; finalist for the University of Wisconsin Press and the National Poetry Series book competitions; teaching at California State University, Fullerton.

Rob Cook is a social dropout living in New York City where he edits *Skidrow Penthouse* with Stephanie Dickinson. Work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Bitter Oleander*, *New Orleans Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Poetry International*, the *Canary*, *Good Foot*, the *Hat*, etc. His collection *The Cellophane Madonnas* was a finalist for the New Issues First Book Award and the Gerald Cable Award.

Jaime Anne Corbacho lives in Brookline, Massachusetts, with her roommate, Sybil, and dog, Costello. She has work forthcoming in *Rattapallax*.

Joshua Corey's *Selah* was published in 2003 by Barrow Street Press; his second book, *Fourier Series*, is forthcoming from Spineless Books. He lives in Ithaca, New York, where he's writing a doctoral dissertation on modernist pastoral, and blogs at joshcorey.blogspot.com.

Huy Dao is a graduate of the New School's M.F.A. program. His work has appeared in *LIT* and *Salonika*. During the day, he is the Case Director of the Innocence Project—www.innocenceproject.org—where he has worked for seven years.

Ales Debeljak holds a Ph.D. in Social Thought from Syracuse University and is director of the Center for Cultural and Religious Studies at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia. A poet, cultural critic, and translator, he has won the Slovenian National Book Award, the Miriam Lindberg Israel Poetry for Peace Prize (Tel Aviv), and the Chiqu Poetry Prize (Tokyo). His books have appeared in English, Japanese, German, Croatian, Serbian, Polish,

Hungarian, Czech, Spanish, Slovak, Lithuanian, Finish, Italian, and Romanian translations. His recent publications in English include *Reluctant Modernity: The Institution of Art and Its Historical Forms* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), *Twilight of the Idols: Recollections of a Lost Yugoslavia* (White Pine, 1994), and three books of poetry: *The City and the Child* (White Pine, 1999), *Dictionary of Silence* (Lumen, 1999), and *Anxious Moments* (White Pine, 1994). His book *The Hidden Handshake: National Identity and European Postcommunism* is forthcoming from Rowman & Littlefield in fall 2004. He is general editor of the book series *Terra Incognita: Writings from Central Europe*, published by White Pine Press. Debeljak and his American wife, together with three children, make their home in Ljubljana.

Will Esposito has recently been reading Vico's *The New Science* and writing a chapbook with poet Lauren Ireland. He lives in Philadelphia.

Melanie Figg's poems are published or forthcoming in the *Iowa Review*, the *Colorado Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *MARGIE*, and other journals. Her first manuscript, *Lucky Bird*, was a finalist for the 2003 Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize. She received her M.F.A. from the University of Utah in 1999 and since then has lived and worked in the Twin Cities. The first line of "Psalm Somatic 4" is in debt to poet Linda Young.

Joanna Fuhrman is the author of *Freud in Brooklyn* (2000) and *Ugh Ugh Ocean* (2003), both published by Hanging Loose Press. Poems from her recently completed manuscript *Moraine* appear in *New American Writing*, the *Hat*, *Conduit*, and *Hanging Loose*. She lives with Bob in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn.

Lara Glenum's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Conjunctions*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Fence*, *Hotel Amerika*, the *Canary*, *La Petite Zine*, *Pleides*, and elsewhere. She is an associate editor of *Verse*. She lives in Athens, Georgia.

Adriana Grant's poems have appeared in the *Diagram*, *Bird Dog*, *Monkey Puzzle*, and *shampoopoetry.com*. Her visual art has been shown at Consolidated Works, the Bemis Building, and Cornish College of the Arts, where she works. In September 2004, works in sugar and tapioca were included in the Bumbershoot Biennale Consumables Show. She lives in Seattle.

Gabriel Gudding's first book, *A Defense of Poetry*, was published in the Pitt Poetry Series in November 2002. He's an Assistant Professor of Literature and Creative Writing at Illinois State University. Recent work appears in *New American Writing*, *Mandorla*, and *L'Bourgeoisine*.

John Hennessy's poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Ontario Review*, *Salt*, the *Sewanee Review*, the *Yale Review*, *New Letters*, *Pleiades*, and *Fulcrum*. He currently teaches creative writing and literature at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Ernest Hilbert's poetry has appeared in the *New Republic*, the *Boston Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *McSweeney's*, the *American Scholar*, *Verse*, and *Fence*. He is the editor of *NC*, an annual journal of new writing, and is on the staff of the *Contemporary Poetry Review*. As an opera librettist, he is a frequent collaborator with the composer Daniel Felsenfeld. Several of their operas have been performed in New York City, both uptown and down, over the past year.

Fanny Howe bio to come.

Geof Huth bio to come.

Betsy Johnson teaches at a small university and preaches most weekends at several rural churches. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Agni* (online), the *Seattle Review*, *5 A.M.*, *Calyx*, *Ascent*, the *Chiron Review*, *Phoebe*, *Plainsongs*, *Diner*, *Slope*, and the *New Zoo Poetry Review*.

Sara Kaplan has spent most of her life in the Southeast, including North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. She also lived in New York, where she graduated from high school. She entered Sweet Briar College in Sweet Briar, Virginia, earning a B.A. magna cum laude in English and Creative Writing. She then entered Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where she recently completed her M.A. degree in poetry. This summer she is moving to Moscow, Idaho, to study at the University of Idaho where she hopes to earn an M.F.A. degree in poetry, finally preparing her to work as a professional poet. Her travels lead her west, as people and places continually refine and influence her passion for poetry.

Kirsten Kaschock's first book, *Unfathoms*, is available from Slope Editions.

She is currently a Ph.D. student at the University of Georgia and has received an M.F.A. in poetry from Syracuse University and another in choreography from the University of Iowa. Recent work of hers can be seen or is forthcoming in the *Diagram*, *Trunk Stories*, *Octopus*, *Pleiades*, and the *Notre Dame Review*.

Paul Killebrew was born and raised in Nashville, Tennessee. He currently resides in Brooklyn and attends law school in Manhattan. His chapbook, *Forget Rita*, was published by the Poetry Society of America in 2003.

Jack Kimball edits Faux Press.

Jennifer L. Knox was born in Lancaster, California—crystal meth capitol of the nation, and home to Frank Zappa, Captain Beefheart, and the Space Shuttle. Her first book *A Gringo Like Me* is forthcoming from Soft Skull Press in 2005. Her work has appeared in the anthologies *Best American Poetry* (2003 and 1997), *Great American Prose Poems: from Poe to Present*. She is the co-curator of the Pete's Big Salmon poetry reading series in Brooklyn, NY.

John Latta's first collection, *Rubbing Torsos*, appeared in 1979 (Ithaca House). A new book titled *Breeze*, winner of the 2003 Ernest Sandeen Prize in Poetry, is recently out (University of Notre Dame Press). New poems are in or forthcoming in *Chicago Review*, *Xantippe*, *Bird Dog*, *Typo*, *Parakeet*, *Electronic Poetry Review*, *No: A Journal of the Arts*, *New American Writing*, *Jacket*, *Boston Review*, *Gam*, *Magazine Cypress*, *Octopus*, and elsewhere. He inhabits Blogland at hotel-point.blogspot.com.

Marcia Mead Lèbre has lived in France since 1973. Recent work has appeared in *Orbis*, *Tears in the Fence*, *Four Corners* and the *Bennington Review*. She took her M.F.A. at Bennington College and co-directs the Paris Writers Workshop.

David Lehman is the series editor of *The Best American Poetry*, which he launched in 1988. He is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *The Evening Sun*, and is on the core faculty of the graduate writing programs at Bennington College and New School University. He received his Ph.D. at Columbia University. He lives in New York City and Ithaca, New York.

Ada Limón is originally from Sonoma, California. She received her M.F.A. from New York University. A two-time Pushcart Nominee and a 2001 fellow at the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, she recently received a N.Y.F.A. grant and won the Chicago Literary Award for Poetry. Her work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Slate Magazine*, *Iowa Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and other publications. She lives and breathes in Brooklyn, New York where she co-curates Pete's Big Salmon Reading Series (www.petesbigsalmon.com) and is nearly happy most of the time.

Tammara Lindsay is writing from State College, PA. Her poems last appeared in *canwehaveourballback?* #16 and *Poem Memoir Story* #4.

In addition to a previous appearance in *LIT*, **Thomas David Lisk's** recent work has appeared in *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Boulevard*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Morpo Review*, *Oklahoma Review*, and *Porcupine*. His poem "Balloons at the Louvre," originally published in *Arts and Letters*, appeared on the *Poetry Daily* website in 2001. His books are *A Short History of Pens Since the French Revolution* and *Aroma Terrapin*.

Ted Mathys's first book of poetry, *Forge*, is forthcoming from Coffee House Press in 2005. Poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Aufgabe*, the *Canary*, *Colorado Review*, *Fence*, *jubilat*, *Indiana Review*, *Ploughshares*, and elsewhere. Originally from Ohio, he currently lives in New York.

Aaron McCollough is the author of *Welkin*, published by Ahsahta Press in 2002 and winner of the first annual Sawtooth Prize in Poetry, and *Double Venus*, published by Salt Publishing in 2004. He lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan with Suzanne Chapman.

Sean McNally resides in Greenpoint, Brooklyn with a wife, poet Jennifer L. Knox. Originally from Milwaukee, he can no longer locate Wisconsin on a map and can no longer tell the difference between right and wrong. His work has appeared in *Quick Fiction*, *Black Book Magazine*, *Open City*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *The United States of Poetry*, and elsewhere. "Get to Know Your Presidential Pets" was recently adapted as a musical play and staged at the Makor/Steinhardt Center in New York City.

Katey Nicosia's poems have appeared in *32 Poems*, *Word Riot*, *Verse Libre Quarterly*, *canwehaveourballback?*, the *Poetry Superhighway*, *Opium Magazine*, and elsewhere. She is the poetry editor of *Word Riot*.

Kathleen Ossip bio to come.

Richard Peabody is a DC native who currently resides in Arlington, VA, with his wife and two daughters. He earned a B.A. from the University of Maryland and an M.A. from American University. Peabody has taught creative writing since 1987 (both fiction and poetry) at area colleges, the Writer's Center in Bethesda, MD, and Johns Hopkins. Peabody founded *Gargoyle Magazine* in 1976 and the magazine will soon celebrate its twenty-ninth anniversary with issue #50. His fiction, poetry, reviews, and essays have appeared in *North American Review*, *Hollins Critic*, *Washington Post Book World*, *Columbus Dispatch*, *Baltimore Sun*, *100 Poets Against the War*, *Poetry East*, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, and *Short Fuse: The Global Anthology of New Fusion Poetry*. He has edited or coedited many anthologies, including *Mondo Barbie* and *A Different Beat: Writings by Women of the Beat Generation*. His books include six collections of poetry, two books of short stories, and a novella.

Lisa Pearson's work has appeared most recently in *Mississippi Review Prize Issue*, *Chelsea*, *Aufgabe*, and *Fiction International*, and *The Alsio Anthology (UK)*. She coedited the anthology *Nortwest Edge: Deviant Fictions* and currently lives in Los Angeles.

Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) was as much a creator of personas as he was of poetry, prose, and criticism, writing under numerous "heteronyms," literary alter egos with fully fleshed identities and writing styles. He was born in Lisbon, Portugal, and spent his adult life there, earning a modest living as a commercial translator. During his lifetime he published little of his vast body of work, most of which appeared posthumously.

Jacques Prévert (1900-1977) was a French poet, songwriter, scenariste of the now classic films *Le JourSse Lève*, *Quai des Brumes*, and *Enfants du Paradis*. His principal collections of poetry are *Paroles* (Gallimard, 1949), *Spectacle* (Gallimard, 1951), *La Pluie et le Beau Temps* (Gallimard 1955), and *Histoires* (Gallimard, 1963). The poem translated here, "Chasse de l'enfants," is from

Paroles (Gallimard, 1949).

Robert Polito is the Director of the Writing Programs at the New School. Dr. Polito is the author of *Doubles* (1995), *Savage Art: A Life of Jim Thompson* (1995), *A Readers's Guide to James Merrill's The Changing Light at Sandover* (1994), and *At Titan's Breakfast: Three Essays on Byron's Poetry* (1987). He is the editor of a forthcoming collection of writing by Manny Farber.

Erika Raskin is a writer from Charlottesville, Virginia. Her nonfiction work has appeared in a number of publications including *The Washington Post* and *Salon*. This story comes from *First Person Present Tense*, a cubist novel told in different voices. Raskin is working on a new novel.

Michael Robbins teaches poetry at Columbia College and is a graduate student at the University of Chicago. His poems have appeared in various ephemera and he reviews poetry for *Boston Review* and *Chicago Review*. He is not fond of digressive contributors' notes.

Anthony Robinson coedits the *Canary* from his nest in Eugene, Oregon. His poems appear in *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Court Green*, *Carve*, the *Mid-American Review*, *Spinning Jenny*, *Octopus*, and other places. He has recently completed his first full-length manuscript and is hard at work on a new book of poems incorporating material from pop music, blockbuster motion pictures, and Jack Chick religious tracts.

Michele Rosenthal's poems appear in such places as *Poetry 180*, *Rattle*, *Rattapallax*, *Atlanta Review*, *Poetry Porch*, and *VENT*. She teaches at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City.

Jerome Sala's latest collection of poems, *Look Slimmer Instantly!*, is due out in 2005 from Soft Skull Press. His poems have appeared in *Boundary 2*, *Conjunctions*, *Rolling Stone*, and many other magazines.

Christopher Salerno's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Spinning Jenny*, *Barrow Street*, *Forklift Ohio*, *Good Foot*, *River City*, and elsewhere. A chapbook, *Waving Something White*, is out from Independent Press. He is currently teaching poetry and American literature at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC.

Michael Schiavo's poetry has appeared in *McSweeney's*, *Unpleasant Event Schedule*, *Good Foot*, *La Petite Zine*, *Small Spiral Notebook*, and several other fine publications. A graduate of the Bennington Writing Seminars and work-study scholar (waiter) at the 2004 Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, he currently lives in Connecticut but as you read this he is traveling westward.

Jason Schneiderman's poetry has appeared in *Columbia*, *The Penguin Book of the Sonnet*, *Tin House*, *Rattapallax*, and is forthcoming in *Grand Street*, and *StoryQuarterly*. He is a senior editor at *Painted Bride Quarterly* and has received fellowships from Yaddo and the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. He has twice been head waiter at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in Vermont. He teaches creative writing at Hofstra University in Long Island. His first collection of poems, *Sublimation Point*, is forthcoming from Four Way Books.

Amy Sickels received her M.F.A. from Penn State University. Her work has been published in the *Madison Review*, *Natural Bridge*, and the *Greensboro Review*. She lives in New York City.

Bruce Smith is the author of four books of poems, *The Common Wages*, *Silver and Information* (National Poetry Series Selection), *Mercy Seat*, and most recently, *The Other Lover* (University of Chicago), which was a finalist for both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. He teaches in the graduate writing program at Syracuse University.

Laurel Snyder is a graduate of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her poetry has been published by *Post Road* and *American Letters and Commentary*, among others. Currently she is living in East Atlanta and working on a historical memoir, tentatively titled, *Location, Location—Confessions of an Urban Pioneer*.

Jason Stumpf holds an M.F.A. from Washington University in Saint Louis. Recent work has appeared in *Circumference*, *Pleiades*, and *Sonora Review*.

Felicia Swanson's fiction has appeared in *Big Muddy: The Journal of the Mississippi River Valley* and *Hair Trigger*, and is forthcoming in *Mars Hill Review*. She teaches writing at Columbia College and Loyola University. She lives in Chicago with her husband and avoids outdoor Halloween festivals.

James Tate is the author of thirteen books of poetry, and a collection of stories. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize.

Jean Tardieu (1903-1995) was a French poet, art critic, essayist, and playwright. His principal collections of poetry are *Accents* (Gallimard, 1939) *Monsieur, Monsieur* (Gallimard, 1951), *Une Voix sans Personne*, (Gallimard, 1951), *Formeries* (Gallimard, 1976), *Comme Ceci, Comme Cela* (Gallimard, 1979) *Margeris* (Gallimard, 1986), and *Da Capo* (Gallimard, 1995). The poems translated here, “Verbe et matière” and “Un Chemin,” first appeared in *Formeries*, (Gallimard, 1976).

Maureen Thorson lives in New York City and can make balloon doggies. Her work has appeared in *canwehaveourballback?*, *Exquisite Corpse*, and is forthcoming in *Good Foot*. “Too Late Now” is, in part, a homophonic translation of Osip Mandelstam’s poem “Starik.”

Originally from New Jersey, Chris Tonelli received a B.S. in Zoology and an M.A. in English from North Carolina State University and taught at NCSU for two years as a visiting lecturer in the English Department. Currently he is working on an MFA at Emerson College where he is the poetry editor for *Redivider* (formerly the *Beacon Street Review*) and a reader for *Ploughshares*. He has been a finalist in the Alligator Juniper national poetry contest and a semifinalist for *Mid-American Review*’s James Wright Poetry Award.

Mike Topp Mike Topp’s work has appeared in *McSweeney’s*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Tricycle: A Buddhist Quarterly*, and elsewhere. His most recent books are *Happy Ending* (Future Tense Press) and *Where We Found You* (Angry Dog Midget Editions). He is currently living in New York City unless he has died or moved.

Tony Tost Tony Tost is the author of *Invisible Bride* and a coeditor of *Octopus*. His poems and reviews appear in *Verse*, *Jacket*, *Typo*, *Spoon River* and the anthology *...and Gentleman: 15 Younger Male American Poets* forthcoming from *Stride* in 2005. He lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina with his fiancée Leigh Plunkett.

Jeff Tweedy has dedicated the last twenty years of his life to being a songwriter and musician, currently for the popular music band Wilco and formerly of the band Uncle Tupelo. His first book of poems, *Adult Head*, was recently published by Nightingale Editions, Zoo Press. He lives in Chicago with his wife and two sons.

Nicholas Twemlow has poems lately appearing or forthcoming in *Gulf Coast*, *Colorado Review*, *spork*, and *Court Green*. He is an editor of the *Canary*, a new magazine of poems. He will be a Fulbright Fellow in New Zealand in 2005.

Joe Wenderoth is the author of *Letters to Wendy’s* (Verse Press, 2002) as well as the poetry collections *Disfortune* (1995) and *It Is If I Speak* (2000), both published by Wesleyan University Press. He teaches at Southwest State University in Minnesota.

Phil West has been published most recently in *Mid-American Review*, *River City*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, and *Slant: A Journal of Poetry*, and has work forthcoming in *Cascadia Review* and *Sentence*. In 2000, he received his M.F.A. from the James A. Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas at Austin. He currently teaches English at San Antonio College and Our Lady of the Lake University. His first book of poetry will be published by Orchard Press in Fall 2004, and he is currently coediting an oral history of the poetry slam, to be published by Soft Skull Press.

Max Winter’s poems have appeared recently in *Volt*, *Boston Review*, *Octopus*, and *Spinning Jenny*, as well as in the anthology *Free Radicals* (Subpress); his reviews have appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *New York Times*, *Bookforum*, and elsewhere. He is a Poetry Editor of *Fence*.

Franz Wright, the son of poet James Wright, was born in Vienna in 1953. During his youth, his family moved to the Northwest United States, the Midwest, and northern California. Wright’s most recent collections of poetry include *Walking to Martha’s Vineyard* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2003) which received a Pulitzer Prize, *The Beforelife* (2001), *Ill Lit: New and Selected Poems* (1998), *Rorschach Test* (1995), *The Night World and the Word Night* (1993), and *Midnight Postscript* (1993). He has also translated poems by René Char, Erica Pedretti, and Rainer Maria Rilke. Wright has received the

PEN/Voelcker Award for Poetry, as well as grants and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Whiting Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Annabelle Yeeseul Yoo graduated from Columbia University where she studied poetry and French literature. Currently working on her first manuscript of poems, she lives and plays in New York City.

Andrew Zawacki is the author of two books of poetry, *Anabranch* (Wesleyan, 2004) and *By Reason of Breakings* (Georgia, 2002), and a chapbook, *Masquerade*, which received the Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America. He is coeditor of *Verse* and edited *Afterwards: Slovenian Writing 1945-1995* (White Pine, 1999). His criticism has appeared recently in *Talisman*, *Boston Review*, *New German Critique*, and *On James Tate* (Michigan, 2004). He studies in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago.

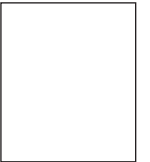
Richard Zenith is a writer, translator, and critic. His translation of Fernando Pessoa & Co.: *Selected Poems* won an American Pen Award for Poetry in Translation.

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270

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